

EPHEMERAL SPACES, UNDYING DREAMS: SOCIAL JUSTICE STRUGGLES IN  
CONTEMPORARY PUERTO RICO

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By  
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The premise of this dissertation is that ephemeral spaces serve as practice ground for enacting fleeting moments of autonomy. My narrative centers the ephemeral nature of political possibility, doing so in a way that attempts to preserve the undecidable directionality of these moments. Focusing on occupation as a tactic of resistance, I discuss two contemporary manifestations I witnessed while in Puerto Rico from 2009-2011: the 62 day system wide student strike organized in 2010 at the University of Puerto Rico and *El Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo*, a squat founded in 2005 to prevent the privatization of a parcel of public coastal land. I call these spaces liberation experiments to underscore my interest in understanding them as part of the project to achieve self-determination for Puerto Ricans.

Although there is some debate as to whether Puerto Rico is a colony in the strict sense of the word, since it was “decolonized” when it became a commonwealth of the United States, it still remains the case that such a relationship of over a century of partial integration to the United States has perverted the political terrain. By linking these queries into the micropolitics of resistance spaces to Puerto Rico’s nonsovereign political terrain, I argue that these ephemeral space/times have political implications that go beyond efforts to shift modes of organizing to prefigurative action emergent

across the globe. My project is to reclaim the term revolution in Puerto Rican Studies as a terrain that lies outside the traditional trajectory of nation-state formation and status debate and am keen to show how efforts to build ephemeral spaces of resistance assist participants in experimenting partial breaks, ruptures and gaps from what Nelson Maldonado Torres calls, “coloniality of being.”

This work builds upon the anthropology of social movements where scholars have done much to emphasize the mundane aspects of organizing, focusing on the affects and ambivalences produced by resistance work. In each chapter, I attend to the way political possibility is experienced and effaced in the intimate moments of struggle. However, my claim to the importance of the ephemeral in our theorizations of social movements is drawn from Caribbeanist, feminist and queer genealogies that posit alternative conceptualizations of temporality and aim to deconstruct transcendental models of History.

By writing experimentally, prioritizing the storytelling and affective domain of living a moment of revolutionary possibility, I amplify the poetics of resistance space. I am not interested in making temporary encampments “more familiar” to the reader but rather in transferring some of that affect to readers through writing. In emphasizing the “poetics,” I underscore that I am invested in producing a text that evokes memories, embodied realizations of my experience in the field—a place that is also my ancestral home(land). In attending to the poetics of ephemeral spaces of resistance, I aim to subvert what J.K. Gibson-Graham identify as “left melancholia” evidenced by our tendency to critique to the point of paralysis, instead stimulating our knowledge of the realm of the possible which emerge within the impossible conditions in which we live.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melissa Rosario is a New York raised Puerto Rican who has dedicated her academic studies to deepen knowledge of the “Puerto Rican experience” a multifarious and complex situation, rich in ambivalences and negotiations. This commitment began officially with her undergraduate honors thesis, “Making Dis/connections to the Homeland from the Outside-In,” completed at Wesleyan University in Anthropology. In it, she focused on how Puerto Rican youth imagine liberation for Puerto Rico and how they articulate that vision through their identity. While supported by a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship she designed a survey, and conducted participant observation with Puerto Ricans in New York and San Juan. Although her work showed Puerto Rican youth understood the nation to be a deterritorial space, they tended to re-affirm the borders between home and diaspora in daily interactions. Thus, she argued that both Puerto Ricans on the island and in the diaspora affirmed a hierarchy of authenticity as each group continually defined true essence of identity and culture as rooted in the island itself. She began experimenting with narrative forms in this first project given the way that her identity was bound up in the very research question itself.

In her graduate work, undertaken at Cornell University, Melissa was trained in multiple areas of inquiry, taking classes that reflect her multiple interests in queer theory, memory, environment, time/space, philosophy and feminism. Deeply committed to social justice projects, she wanted to understand how changing global attitudes toward the logic of traditional state-based politics were shifting traditional protest strategies. Landing in Puerto Rico in the midst of mass protests to austerity

measures turned her to the matter of anti-privatization and how occupation could offer breaks from the tyranny of oppressive conditions folks faced.

Although her dissertation grapples with the politics of representation in social movements, Melissa has become increasingly interested in developing research which foments, and not just narrates social justice struggles. In her long-term plans, she hopes to build a gathering space for activists situated in different projects and places to meet and share strategies and build lasting coalitions.

In 2012, Dr. Rosario began working on a collaborative research project with members of Cornell's Participatory Action Research Network in order to investigate the barriers to graduate student public engagement, a project which includes discourse analysis of University's statements on engagement and interviews with extension staff, administrators and graduate students on their own experiences with engaged research. In the summer, the team will be participating in a seminar on Action Research in the United Kingdom where they will be joined by other scholars from around the globe also conducting research on their institutions. The seminar will be an opportunity to share preliminary findings on each respective project and infer broader trends. This project on ethics of research and engagement will make Melissa quite effective for delivering social justice initiatives on campus and off in later years.

Dr. Rosario will be going to Bowdoin College in the fall of 2013 for a postdoctoral fellowship awarded to her through the Consortium for Faculty Diversity. She can be reached at [Melissa.rosario@gmail.com](mailto:Melissa.rosario@gmail.com).

*For my parents—*

*David and Margarita*

*—in eternal gratitude for their love and support.*

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To my two writing groups: the Anthro + 1 team—Aftab, Chika, Courtney, Gökçe, Saiba—and Spaces of Permeability crew—Ella, Omar, Mary Pat, Sofia, Vero—thank you for holding me accountable to producing when others did not and for engaging so deeply with my work regardless of whether what I shared was something closer to stream of consciousness or an almost complete chapter. It is a rare treat to have experienced something so positive in what can be a long and frustrating process. From you all, I have learned to be a better reader and the truth of the notion that all ideas are dialogical.

Special thanks to Charis Boke, my teacher and friend, who understood my activist spirit and helped me to cultivate her so I could present her in all her bravery and deep compassion to the world. You encouraged me to trust that intuitive grit while strategizing ways to make it pass academic muster. Thank you for reading my work with equal parts anthropology, creative writing and activist longing.

Mar, thank you for creating a safe space for me this year to produce this dissertation and for helping me to remember that what I am doing matters. My



creativity always flourished in the warmth of your presence. I love "talking it out" with you and watching my jumbled thoughts become freestyled eloquence.

To my dissertation committee—Vilma, Andrew and Hiro—thank you for giving me free reign to explore the ideas and forms that excite(d) me and for pushing me to think of a broad audience of interlocutors. Hiro, thank you for introducing me to the area of temporality and for always demanding the best of me. Andrew, I appreciate sincerely your writing advice, your careful reading and engagement and for your ability to put my work in conversation with an expansive set of literatures. Vilma, thank you for your candor and for supporting my work from the very beginning. As a chair, I never doubted that you had my back and in this (academic) world of insincerity and unclear intentions, I am grateful for you.

Michael Ralph: impeccably sharp thinker, always there in a bind. Your feedback and friendship is always right on time.

Maurice Stevens, thank you for being an exemplary mentor and friend to me in my darkest and brightest times. I consider you to be the best example of what a mentor should be. I look forward to our skype conversations and could not imagine making it through graduate school without you. The spirit of this text attempts to reflect the intersection of hands, heart and head where you live.

I thank the Mellon Mays Foundation for its generosity throughout my career, first as an undergraduate fellow and then through the years as a Ph.D. student. Beyond the monetary support they have given, under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the Social Science Research Council, I have come to know so many good people in this network that it is impossible to name you all, but I trust that you

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Last but not least, I thank all those beautiful luchadorxs que conocí en Puerto Rico. Los bois del campa, los amo. Siempre seré la vecina aunque me encuentre en el otro lado del charco (por ahora). Hay tantos ~~estudiantes~~ *huelguistas* que me apoyaron con el hecho simple de llevar a cabo su lucha. Algunos son mencionados por nombre en este texto, pero no todxs. Sin ustedes no habría nada que escribir.

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## PREFACE: THE WRITER'S INTENTION

*El artista sabe lo que hace, pero para que merezca la pena  
debe saltar esa barrera y hacer lo que no sabe.*

-Eduardo Galeano

Before writing this dissertation, I was reticent to claim the identity writer. Like the umbrella category in which it is situated—artist—I thought myself never good enough to claim to belong to the magical guild of those who transform the most mundane details into revelations, providing deep insight to the reader who is willing to receive. And despite the fact that throughout my life that I have been mesmerized by the creative spirit, I never made it an explicit project of mine to *write* even though that's exactly what I have been doing all along. But when I recently came upon the above quote written by Galeano, I realized that writing this dissertation *was* my way of doing what I didn't know how to do. Be a writer. Give in to the writing. Ride along the ethnographic trail, returning to myself and recognizing her finally.

And I am so grateful for the journey. Learning how to be an open channel for creativity to flow through has been my single greatest achievement. That being said, I ask for a kind reader who realizes that sometimes there **are isn't** the clarity of the artist in this writing, although she is certainly, emergent.

I begin with this statement to locate the sometimes confusing and slippery text which follows. I ask the reader to join me on an exploration of the terrain of resistance, of a moment of political possibility in *la tierra boriken*. I especially think of those

students, professionals, activists, allies (most somewhere in between) who know of these spaces and times that I write intimately, and hope that they find some resonance with their own memories and feelings here. I wrote this text in an effort to bring all parts of me more fully into the community. I hope that it will inspire dialogue and imaginations and not be exiled or silenced. The things that I speak here, I do because of my commitment to returning to silences that blind us and speaking them, finally releasing them and going beyond. At base, this is my intention: that it inspires us to remember *differently* and to live now with a sense of purpose and worth, full of consciousness about what we are doing and to see the distance between that vision and our actual lives—without feeling guilt, judgment or frustration—so that we can return to the practice of shortening the distance between these two intentions everyday.

I leave you with an invocation:

Let us find those cracks in the system  
Following the light which floods in through the smallness of the break  
Though our bodies may be trapped as the walls crumble around us  
We will be free.

## PROLOGUE: ENTERING A MAELSTROM

When I arrived in San Juan near the end of September 2009, massive protests were underway in response to Governor Luis Fortuño Bursset's recently unveiled austerity plan known as the Program for Change and Economic Recovery. Protestors main target was Law 7, formally known as *Ley Especial Declarando Estado de Emergencia Fiscal y Estableciendo Plan Integral de Estabilización Fiscal para Salvar el Crédito de Puerto Rico*, an emergency law which declared the island to be in a state of "financial emergency" and established an integral plan for fiscal stabilization to "save the credit of Puerto Rico" by imposing hefty budgetary cuts in public services. The reason Law 7 was so controversial was that it authorized the Governor to make considerable public sector layoffs—8,000 government workers were dismissed in May 2009 and 16,470 more in September. In addition, Law 7 altered the formula for determining what percentage of the Government budget would go to The University of Puerto Rico, and effectively lowered the eleven campus island wide, public university system's budget by approximately \$144 million. The law also helped clear the way for the privatization of the social service sector since those public jobs that were being eliminated were now being redeveloped by private industries as a part of a public-private partnership model. In addition, Law 7 gave the government the power to suspend any agreements established through the collective bargaining process, thereby taking power away from union workers.

As my reader might have already surmised, Fortuño is a staunch conservative, widely admired stateside by right wing republicans for his austerity measures. Contrary to what the state of emergency might claim, the “crisis” his policies targeted is nothing new. Puerto Rico’s economy has been declining since the 1970s. Three years before he took office in 2006, the government declared bankruptcy. For a period of two weeks, the island had to close all 1600 public schools and shut down forty-three government offices, putting almost 100,000 people out of work for the same period. As leader of *el Partido Nuevo Progresista de Puerto Rico* or the New Party for Progress (PNP), the political party that supports full annexation to the United States as the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the union, Fortuño was widely supported during the elections, defeating his opponent Aníbal Acevedo Vilá by 220,000 votes, the largest margin of the popular vote ever secured by a candidate in forty-four years. Although part of Fortuño’s popularity can be explained by the fact that the PNP has increasingly gained electoral support over the years, Fortuño was also hugely popular during his campaign because he promised to alleviate the deep recession without firing a single government worker.

Despite the very real financial crisis that Puerto Rico finds itself in, by targeting the average citizen as a result of years of fiscal mismanagement, the emergency law was opposed by a broad cross section of the population because it was seen as evidence of an ever increasing problem of government corruption which would deepen the crisis instead of alleviating it. Although massive popular protests mirrored other global responses to spreading austerity policies, in Puerto Rico which include massive public sector layoffs were being faced by communities around the globe in the wake of the US financial crisis, in Puerto Rico, opposition was also based on a sense of betrayal. Given



that Government is the single largest employer on the island and Fortuño fired more people than any other governor in history, most were fearful about what the four years of his term would bring.

The crescendo of popular opposition to Fortuño's austerity measures came just two weeks after my arrival to the island on October 15, 2009 for *el paro nacional* (the national stoppage). On the morning of the event, I made my way to *la milla de oro*, (Golden Mile) a one-mile stretch of Ponce de León Avenue in Hato Rey with a friend. *El paro* started out as a march in opposition to the layoffs and was organized by *Todo Puerto Rico Por Puerto Rico* (All [of] Puerto Rico for Puerto Ricans) a coalition of civil service groups including labor unions, public employees, religious leaders, workers and students who had come together to contest Fortuño's policies. Media estimates that there were 150,000 participants at the march. Its location at *la milla de oro* was symbolic: the golden mile is home to most of the local, international banks and corporate company headquarters that are housed on the island, what we might think of as San Juan's Wall Street, a major financial district.

Although I knew well of other successful mass mobilizations in Puerto Rico's history, the protests came as a surprise to me. I had never witnessed an action of its scale and scope in the four years I had been coming to Puerto Rico regularly. Still, the critiques being lodged against the government were familiar. In fact in my first site of research, *El Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo* (Campsite Beaches for the People), protestors felt compelled to start a direct action encampment on five acres of public land in order to prevent the appropriation of it by the Marriott Corporation by the Government of Puerto Rico. The more I learned about the case: from the 99-year rental

contract awarded to the Marriott by a defunct branch of the Government in 1996, to HR properties—the developer—starting to clear the land without holding public hearings or submitting the needed impact reports—the more I understood about the depth of government corruption on the island. When I spoke to my interlocutors early on, they were keen to highlight the secrecy of the contract and its length of time as evidence of the Government’s interest in facilitating a defacto privatization of public lands. The case of *Campamento Playas Pa’l Pueblo* points to a long history of special privileges given to US corporations and international financial banks in exchange for their siting of factories and other beacons of modernity on the island.

Before arriving to Puerto Rico in 2009, I planned to connect the case of *el Campamento Playas Pa’l Pueblo* to literal and symbolic expropriations of the coastline but upon my arrival, found myself increasingly drawn to document and theorize its relationship to the other spaces of resistance which were emergent on the island. In the three short term preliminary research trips I conducted over a two year period, I learned that most of the resident activists at the campsite were radically disillusioned by electoral politics and political parties and understood the best approach to political action was to “chill out [because] Puerto Rico is fucked” as one of the residents had told me on my very first visit to the site in 2007. In rejecting the terms of statehood or commonwealth as constitutive of the political terrain, I hoped this space would shed light on what can be political for that which refuses politics. Now I found myself wondering how to map this refusal onto the current uprisings, only just beginning.

Indeed, in the days prior to *el paro*, I was surprised by my interlocutors’ palpable sense of anticipatory excitement, a striking contrast from earlier attitudes they

had shared with me about the (im)possibility of political action. But, I quickly learned this attitude had little to do with a restored hope in politics as usual. Instead, residents at *campa*<sup>1</sup> felt that this was the moment where an uprising would become possible. As many interlocutors there described it, the moment carried with it the expectation that Puerto Ricans would “wake up” and finally rebel.

As a general series of political disturbances, *el paro nacional* was important one for social protest: arguably the biggest display of collective resistance on the island in over three decades. And yet, the name’s linking with the national made it appear anachronistic at best, misplaced at worst. At a moment when ideas of nationalism are increasingly suspect, and on an island where people have consistently voted against independence, favoring some form of continued relationship with the United States, we might ask: why does the nation continue to be a powerful rallying call for Puerto Ricans even when contesting local government policies? I argue that although these massive protests were not lodged at the United States, in Puerto Rico, the nation continues to operate as an affirmative tool of “the people” as a popular group who does not approve of the decisions made by the Government, irrespective of whether the target is insular or foreign to the populace. As such, the naming of the stoppage as “national” did not apply in any facile way to independence as a political project or status choice. But there was *something* in the air felt like the abstract freedom which I associated with the draw of independence.

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<sup>1</sup> For the duration of the text, I refer to *el Campamento playas pa’l pueblo* by its nickname, *campa*.

## *Feeling Change*

Immersed in the main arena of the protest, I knew little of what was going on outside the march or even, at times, my own body. I struggled to stay grounded and attentive to everything as my friend's father compared this march and this moment to other historic periods of collective resistance in Puerto Rican history of which he knew a great deal as an active defender of independence for many years. He made comparisons between *el paro* and the March for Peace in Vieques—organized during the height of an international campaign to get the U.S. Navy to end decades long bombing on one of the smaller islands of the Puerto Rican archipelago. Looking around, he estimated that the numbers of participants were just as high and that participants seemed to come from all ages and political party affiliations. While I could see the grandmothers, teens and people in-between, I wondered how he could tell who was who politically speaking. Of course, *el paro* was different from the march for Vieques in striking ways: it was organized to be a silent march, akin to a moving vigil: all participants were asked by organizers to wear white. *El paro* lacked the somber attitude of the march for peace: it was a rowdy protest. I kept coming across better and better performative pieces of refusal.

The scene itself was so overwhelming, a collision of images, bodies, smells and sounds that I found it difficult to stay tuned into the conversation. My attitude shifted between confusion, discomfort and boredom, a rhythm that would become increasingly familiar to me as I spent more and more time in protest spaces. I was advised to wear full length jeans and closed toe shoes “just in case” there was an outbreak of violence

on the part of the police. Although I would grow accustomed to this activist dress in later days, in this moment I felt so hot I thought I might faint.

Located somewhere between boredom, exhaustion and sensory overload, the most overpowering scent was a chemical one that I couldn't place as fresh spray paint until I caught up to a group protestors—some masked, some not—who were busy marking the route with slogans that represented the diversity of viewpoints of the participants. Most of the acts of vandalism targeted the banks on the routes and a newly completed luxury residential complex. Anticipating such backlash, many of the buildings were boarded up with large wooden panels.

The owners of one branch of First Bank that didn't close for the day probably wished they after as protestors sprayed directly on their glass windows: *NO LEY 7* (No to Law 7). The rest of the graffiti was written on abandoned buildings appear unexpectedly, seeming misplaced between newly built luxury complexes. They are prevalent all across the island dotting the landscape serving as evidence of a much older crisis. While many of the graffiti tags denounced Law 7, others called for class revolution *arriba los de abajo; que la crisis la paguen los ricos* (rise up those from below; let the rich pay for the crisis). Others still were more surprising: like the ones that analogized the current administrators as fascists and others that signaled the links between the queer movement and economic concerns like: *cambio de sexo legal y gratuito; dile no al discrimen por orientación sexual and los gays también somos obreros* (sex change free and legal; no to discrimination for sexual orientation; gays are also workers).

In addition to the main concentration of protestors at the march, there were a series of acts of civil disobedience organized across the island. Generally speaking, these alternative demonstrations were designed to bring the economy to a standstill, and aimed at interrupting the traffic or flow of commodities and people. These well timed, ephemeral actions complemented the mass showing at the march, adding a distinctly radical edge to the stoppage. For example, a group called EDUCAMOS (we educate) from *la Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico* (Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico), a union of teachers in Puerto Rico with a membership base of approximately 32,000 blocked the entrance to Wal-Mart in Caguas for a few hours. On the other side of the island, a group of students from the UPR's Mayagüez campus made a human chain blocking entrances to the Mayagüez Mall, the largest commercial center on the west coast of the island, for several hours.

In addition, at the main march, there were also two sit-ins spontaneously organized during the day held just above the heads of the protestors on the *Expreso Las Américas*, one of San Juan's major highways. The first included a diverse group of members of two powerful unions on the island: the *Unión Independiente Auténtica de la Autoridad de Acueductos y Alcantarillados* (Independent Union of the Water and Sewage Authority) and *Unión de Trabajadores de la Industria Eléctrica y Riego* (The Electric Industry Union Workers) popularly known as UTIER, along with students from the University of Puerto Rico. After one hour, the union members decided to lift the sit-in, declaring it a success. Soon after, a group of young people who participated in the first action, decided to take the expressway alone and stay there indefinitely because they wanted to really create a stoppage. They effectively blocked the highway for five

hours. As people found out what was going on, they joined the sit-in and grew to approximately 800 protestors: the overwhelming majority of the participants were youth and many of them students at the University of Puerto Rico.

Throughout the day, various units of the police including *la Fuerza de Choque* (riot police) and *la Unidad Montada* (mounted unit) arrived on the scene. The number of officers slowly increased until the numbers of protestors and officers were about equal. By late afternoon, the police had surrounded the activists, blocking all access roads to the site of the protest and ordered they evacuate. While the activists taking part in the sit-in held an impromptu general assembly to decide what action to take, older activists and those in solidarity with the students formed a human chain around them and tried to negotiate with the officers to keep them at bay. Ex political prisoner Rafael Cancel Miranda also made a speech asking students to lift their protest. As one of the most revered figures of the Puerto Rican independence movement—known best for his participation on the March 1, 1954 attack on the U.S. Capitol Building led by Lolita Lebrón and joined by Irving Flores and Andrés Figueroa Cordero for which he served 25 years in prison—I was shocked to hear he had urged the activists to lift their sit-in. His attitude was driven not by a weakened sense of radicalism but by the sense that it was important that activists pick their battles wisely.

Although they voted to lift the sit-in, the *paro nacional* was really just the beginning of students' protest against the current economic changes. Many students later credited this spontaneous sit-in as the moment where they were radicalized for the first time, believers in possibilities unthinkable before *el paro*. As Xiomara Caro, a second year law student—who would later become one of the most outspoken members

of the Student's national negotiating committee—explained in an interview, she was still very new to social movement organizing, despite the fact that she had worked as a community organizer for several years. As she described it:

For people like me, who aren't really political, they can't see the depth of problems that the social structure creates until they get involved in another [self-made] structure. On the day of the national stoppage we did a sit-in and had an ad-hoc assembly on the streets. When you participate in something like this, you can see the power you have. I mean, I was a person that believed in the system you know, I was raised in the system. I thrived in the system. But last year [2009], it was impossible to deny that there was a problem with it. Moments like this one created a sense of power that we could make an alternative to the system.

One of the most important things that Xiomara's comments highlight is the symbiotic relationship that exists between imagining and making alternatives. When she remarked that "You can't see the depth of the problems of the societal structure you accept until you try making one for yourself," she signals two different conundrums of activist work. The first is that key problems (inequality, injustice, etc) one tends to accept because they are so ingrained in society become visible. The second is that one can see how challenging it is to create structures that don't reproduce the same problems. The possibility opened up by this spontaneous manifestation of collective power lead Xiomara and others to believe they could craft alternatives, even as they narrowly avoided repression by officers.

Xiomara's description of *el paro* and the successful sit-in as a moment that created a sense that change was possible, points to a key interest that drives this dissertation. How can we capture a moment of political possibility? How do we identify the conditions under which such a feeling is effaced? By highlighting the



micropolitics of living in temporary resistance spaces, I will show that ephemeral spaces built from radical actions inspire activists to commit to the project of liberation.

Although I will reference to other actions and spaces I participated in, I will focus the majority of my attention to life and strategies mobilized in *el Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo*, an eight year old environmentalist squat and the University of Puerto Rico strike which lasted for sixty-two days in 2010 at the Río Piedras campus where I was based. By bringing together two different ephemeral spaces of resistance, ones which I arrived to during their decline and emergence respectively, my task is both focus on the oscillation between repetition and change in social justice struggles. I aim to highlight the similarities between these spaces not just as sites of the anti-privatization movement (of which they certainly form a part) but also as distinct form of contemporary political engagement in Puerto Rico. I advocate that we think of these spaces as liberation experiments, because they have the potential to teach participants strategies that can help them realize a more autonomous existence. I understand my categorization of these resistance spaces as liberation experiments to be a political claim that relates to my own commitment to decolonizing knowledge, a project which I elaborate upon in the introduction.

Like the short-term duration of an experiment, these spaces have a long-standing effect that ripples outwards immeasurably. As Rafael Acevedo wrote about the first strike in an opinion piece published by *El Nuevo Día*:

Es una experiencia liberadora. Confirma que las utopías no son masturbaciones mentales. Son la energía, la alegría y el entusiasmo puestos en función de una alternativa que antes se creía imposible. Hay esperanza. El tiempo que dure este proceso será un taller de aprender a ser libres. [It is a liberating experience. It confirms that utopias are not

mental masturbations. They are the energy, the happiness and the enthusiasm placed in function of an alternative that was once thought impossible. There's hope. The time that this process lasts, it will be a workshop for learning to be free.]

Although I do not agree with Acevedo's claim that these spaces be thought of as utopias, I do concede the singularity of the temporality of "everyday" life in direct actions. My project is to not romanticize this time, but to explore this distinct sense of possibility as it is experienced in mundane day-to-day interaction. What I find most useful about his description of the student strike is that it points to their temporary nature. Perhaps it is this very temporal limit which makes it so vital to document them as they are in process. Even though we realize such spaces are inherently ephemeral, Acevedo reminds us of their transformative nature. In this work, I undertake the project of linking two distinct sites of struggle in order to begin to conceptualize the multiple and discontinuous routes to enact and imagine liberation in the contemporary moment.

## INTRODUCTION: A NONLINEAR LIFE OF RESISTANCE

In this dissertation, I propose that temporary resistance encampments—a squat and a strike—be thought together as part of the struggle to cultivate autonomy and consciously shape new subjectivities in the non-sovereign context<sup>1</sup> of Puerto Rico. At a moment when mass nonviolent occupations of urban public spaces, loosely organized by the principles of horizontalism and non-hierarchical decision-making have become so prevalent that many experts call for us to recognize them as an emergent form of political engagement, my study of the practice of occupation is particularly timely (Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella 2011; Solomon and Palmieri 2011; Juris and Rasza 2012; Maharawal, 2012; Feixa 2012).<sup>2</sup> Disillusioned with political processes, dwindling options for employment and frustration with corruption and the failure(s) of capitalism, these new resistance spaces herald our entry into a moment marked by considerable ambivalence regarding what change is possible.

Although this research was undertaken during the rise of new forms of political engagement per say, it is not a study of them. Indeed, the two spaces where I worked

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<sup>1</sup> Yarimar Bonilla proposed the term “the non-sovereign Caribbean” to describe the varied degrees of “graduated” “denationalized” or “flexible” zones of sovereignty (Ong 1999, 2006; Sassen 2006) characteristic of the region. She defines the non-sovereign Caribbean as “societies which have followed an alternative path to decolonization (through juridical integration) and which continue to be entangled in contemporary relationships of colonial and imperial dominance” (2008: 8). Even for those island nations that have achieved the traditional nation-state enduring legacies of colonialism and the lack of control over its resources, markets and people in the face of neoliberal reform, IMF structural adjustments and global trade regulations may be cause for an even more expansive notion of “nonsovereignty” therein.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, we must recognize that the claim that these projects are “new” is not entirely right; anarchists have dedicated their activist labor to cultivating “prefigurative” politics by self-fashioning or do-it-yourself projects for hundreds of years and direct actions like sit-ins and more radical practices of occupation were very much a part of the success of many grassroots projects. Instead, the claim for newness rests on the fact that occupations were once understood as a strategy whereas now they are primarily a form of political engagement, not necessarily tied to a social movement or a project of the most radical sectors of society.

were direct actions in the traditional sense mobilized in the service of a larger anti-privatization struggle that varied social movement actors have participated in over the years in Puerto Rico. Still, their existence in the contemporary moment provides insight into the “time politics” (Greenhouse 1996) of direct action in the contemporary moment.

Time is a vital dimension of social practice and as such, one of the key interests of anthropologists since the founding of the discipline. Durkheim (1915), Malinowski (1927), Evans-Pritchard (1939, 1940), Lévi-Strauss (1963), and Geertz (1973) have all written on the topic of temporality. But my concern is not about how to understand cultural practices of timekeeping—a mode of inquiry brilliantly critiqued by Alfred Gell (1992)<sup>3</sup>—but rather how particular moments become “revolutionary.” Despite the militarized, sometimes violent and masculinist implications of the term revolution, as a time politics, it signals the moment of unfixing the future at once from a knowable thing to malleable thing. In that sense, revolutionary time is characterized by a radical openness to the future even as it is underwritten by a powerful sense of uncertainty.

For my purposes, Carol Greenhouse's concept of time politics is useful because she argues that time is really about the basic question “what makes things happen and

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<sup>3</sup> As I suggest here, the strength of Gell's seminal work which critiques the anthropology of time is in his claim that key scholars have both over exaggerated the difference between cultural constructions of time and made metaphysical arguments for inherent differences in temporal maps that are based on an erroneous belief that sociological analysis could produce an understanding of “the strictly metaphysical goals of rationalist philosophizing” (1992:14). Gell is much more interested in the economic utility of time, and thus he focuses on the capitalist driven ideas of resources and profit maximization of our uses of time to explore how one creates temporal maps and orders out of lived experience. From this point of view, temporary activist spaces are arguably a waste of time, given as they are to large expanses of time that is not instrumentalized into logics of profit maximization or of time budgeting (In fact, in the the next chapter on dead time, I will argue that such “wasted” time is an essential part of become radicalized). As such, he leaves little contemplation for the problem of change, of how things change as a result of one's experience of time.

what makes acts relevant in relation to social experience..." (1996:1). She argues that time is not primarily about coming to terms with natural phenomena but primarily about processes of legitimation. Her work takes a broad array of cross-cultural examples, focusing on the way that the powerful manipulate notions of temporality to address crises of legitimacy through the law. As such, she argues that "social time is not about time passing but about the vulnerability of political institutions to legitimacy crises of various kinds" (15). In a similar vein, revolutionary time is a moment of radical undoing of the government's legitimacy but concerns itself with how the disaffected navigate this evacuation of the legitimacy of normative time.

Although in the field of anthropology there has been a rapid rise in studies of emergent political projects like Dignity Uprising,<sup>4</sup> *Los Indignados* and, # Occupy Movement there has not been a discussion of the time politics of said mobilizations. However, I have noticed efforts to characterize the sensuous nature of being a participant in radical political praxis in moments where governmental and other structures whose legitimacy is thrown into question to non-participants. A characteristic example comes from a piece which appeared in *American Ethnologist* by Reem Saad entitled "The Egyptian Revolution: A Triumph of Poetry:"

I use the term revolution here, although the 18 days in Tahrir do not fit any academic or analytical definition of the term. But I write this piece from a personal rather than an academic standpoint. I am a participant in the events I describe, and like many others in my position, do not see the time frame to which the term applies as the 18 days that ended with the fall of Mubarak. We use the term to denote a process that is far from over, and, perhaps like the poetry verses I consider, it is a mantra that motivates us to continue our efforts. In this sense, the term revolution

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<sup>4</sup>According to Achille Mbembe, the name "Arab Spring" was an imposition of the West as a gloss for struggles which were known locally as dignity uprisings (public presentation, "Frantz Fanon and the Subject of Emancipation" Cornell University, October 16, 2012).

does not describe past events but signifies an intention and a goal (2012: 65).

By locating himself in the midst of the Egyptian uprising as a participant, Saad argues that placing boundaries around the "revolution" is antithetical to the process of working for change. At the same time, it is a missed opportunity to contribute to the debates on relevance of "insider" positionalities in anthropology. It is not insignificant at all that Saad's definition of revolution appeared in the footnotes instead of the text proper. As the quote above signals, Saad understands such an idea of revolution to be unacademic, perhaps because it lacks sharp lines and verifiable boundaries. But I argue that this feeling of deep dissatisfaction with the current possibilities and yet a sense that we "may come up short but we have to try and change things anyway" is the most significant part of the time politics of current modes of political engagement. This dissertation turns to "the inside" of resistance encampments in order to uncover the feeling of revolutionary time, showing how it is inhabited by activists even as I affirm the sheer fragility of its existence.

In Fanny Söderbäck's recent publication entitled "Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporal Return"<sup>5</sup> she outlines the relationship between experiences in time and our

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<sup>5</sup> It bears to mention that after I begun to conceptualize my project as one that explores the question of revolutionary time, I came upon Fanny Söderbäck's article that theorizes the same problem. As a philosopher of feminist theorists' Irigaray and Kristeva, she argues that the question of time is a central problem their work because of their critique of transcendence, and progress--narratives of social change that assume male bodies--even though their opuses are not explicitly framed around the matter of temporality. She argues that in uncovering the operation of sexual difference in dominant metaphors and dichotomies to understand society, Kristeva and Irigaray's time politics create the possibility for revolutionary movement. Her own concept of "revolutionary time" is based on her criticism of feminist efforts to reclaim cyclical time as much as it is a critique of efforts to insert female bodies into linear time. For Söderbäck, revolutionary time can only be brought into being by navigating the space that exists between linear and cyclical time. Although the genesis of my interest in conceptualizing revolutionary time comes out of a preoccupation with the way our language structures possibilities for achieving alternative futures (particularly important in a nation understood to have failed in a traditional

understanding of what is possible. Her criticism of linear time is that it compels us to forget the past and that it actually prevents us from returning to it. Paradoxically, we lose continuity with it and become trapped in the past, unable to produce new horizons in the present. For Söderbäck, the vehicle for the return is the body. Indeed, she argues that it is only in recuperating the body that it becomes possible to open up routes for social change.

In my own experiences, I too have found that the body is a useful heuristic for identifying the repetitions that keep us trapped in a time that forecloses possibility for radical change. At the same time, the natural circular rhythms of the body necessary for life also decenters the promise of linear progress, forcing us to grapple with the ambivalent movement of social change. Following Söderbäck's theoretical observations on the operation of time in feminist philosophical work, I take a recursive approach to revolutionary time, mobilizing a narrative that navigates between the cyclical and the linear in order to give primacy to the always unfinished nature of radical praxis. In so doing, I am not only positing that we think of revolution in a more holistic way but also that we honor the "fact" of activist subjectivity—an understanding that it always has further to go, and more to imagine. I argue that the best way to identify the fragmentary nature of revolutionary time is to linger in its possibility as a feeling that overtakes the senses always made ambivalent by the gaps, ruptures and the breaks that tell us what the revolution has left to achieve.

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sense to achieve it), my work has been enriched by discovering Söderbäck's work. Her intimate knowledge of the relationship of time and difference has subsequently informed my understanding of the import of time to change.

In order to center the promises inherent in moments we might think of as "revolutionary" while always keeping in view those practices and unconscious habits that keep us from inhabiting it fully, I focus almost exclusively on intra-movement outcomes, rather than on extra-movement outcomes. Laura Pulido (2003) differentiates the "exterior" and "interior" dimensions of social movements. The former imply the external effects of social struggles: ways that institutions, policies and political structures are transformed by grassroots protests (see for example, Amenta and Caren 2004; Burnstein 1999; Meyer et. al 2005; Weldon 2011). In the fields of political science and sociology, this focus on exterior dimensions of social movements is much more prevalent than in anthropology. These scholars measure the import of social movements by developing causal links between structural change and protest politics.

Interior dimensions of social justice struggles engage subtle effects of participating in radical political action, asking how one's sense of self and of what is attainable shifts as a result of experiencing revolutionary time. Some sociologists have focused on very specific aspects of this shift such as emotion and biographical impact (McAdam 1989), and collective identity formation (Taylor and Whittier 1992) but a significant number of anthropologists that I discuss below focus on the interior life of movements, particularly those who emphasize the challenges of living one's politics. In PostSocialist Europe, examples abound of ethnographies that center the micropolitics of resistance highlighting how subjects navigate the ambivalent conditions after the decline of socialism. These new movements have also shown us alternative possibilities for engaging in alternative (leftist) progressive politics in the present. One of the best things about this work and what I try to follow in my own ethnographic writing is to



emphasize the challenge of enacting a politics of liberation outside the spectacular moments that tend to be emphasized in media representations and (even, in some cases, our own ethnography). For example, Maple Razsa and Pacho Velez's *Bastards of Utopia* (2010) a documentary which takes place in Croatia follows three activists in their everyday life and refuses utopian narratives. Instead, it moves through varied scales as in one scene where Razsa discusses with Jelena the importance of mass scale protests while he meticulously cleans a group squat where he is residing. Taking us into the intimate planning stages and chaos of public direct action, it shows us the emotional fallout between activists when massive WTO protests turn violent or when they are evicted from the free store they opened in a squatted building.

Larisa Kurtovic's work on the politics of *not yet*, describes with biting clarity the potential of and limits to social justice struggles waged by non-activists in contemporary Bosnia who were not part of the wave of protests associated with the global uprising of 2010 and 2011. In emphasizing the work of neighbors to honor the death of a friend by occupying a very busy intersection for several days, she interrogates a form of ethical practice that she describes in Bloch's terms as "the not yet" (1986). Focusing on the confusion of two notebooks—one marked as a book of mourning and another whose title was left incomplete (Petition to the Cantonal and Federal Government demanding...), she describes the importance of open-endedness in radically uncertain times. Writing of the incomplete title she argued that "to live in the carcass of the demised regime, and between the aporias of a new one, at some point necessitates leaving certain rubrics blank" (2012:9).

In chorus with Kurtovic's work Razsa (2012) and Juris' (2008) later work, I suggest one way we might work to redefine revolution is in attending to the affect it produces in participants. As we know, mass protests are successful when they manage to generate a palpably embodied response in those who come together to challenge the injustices they face in the world (Juris 2008, Collins 2001, Lyon and Barbalet 1994, Thrift 2004). To be in the presence of many other people contesting the same process, law, injustice, etc. is said to transform the negative affect which motivates participants to engage in protest transforms their negative affect into a feeling of collective solidarity (Durkheim 1964 [1933]), or what Collins calls "emotional energy" (2001). Building on Collins and others, Jeffrey Juris terms the underlying embodied dimension of emotion in activist work generated in major direct action protests as "affective solidarity" (2008). Affective solidarity is that which is produced by emotional energy—a shared sense of emotion that transforms participants' understanding of themselves. As Juris has shown and in the case of anti-globalization WTO protests, actions which create affective solidarity are also often those that get bad press and so they are conceived of as failures vis-à-vis the goals of the movement. Of particular concern are what he calls "free form direct actions" which are difficult to integrate into ideologies of non-violence that tend to be associated with the new social movements. In this work, I am interested in the free form of direct action itself—especially those moments which are not targeted for the public but are shared nonetheless among participants.

I further texture the interior life of resistance spaces by thinking through the term *la convivencia* a concept which signals the challenge of cohabitating with fellow

activists as inherent in the struggle for fomenting social change. By prioritizing the mundane living together as the terrain of radical praxis, I mobilize the term *la convivencia* to reflect my desire to move away from providing a hero-centered account of movement spaces. In so doing, I return to some very old and unresolved questions posed by feminists of color who challenged the boundaries of both racial liberation movements and (white) gender equality projects (Combahee River Collective 1986; Lorde 1984, Anzaldúa 1987, hooks 1981, Minh-Ha 1989, Bambara 1970). Following these feminists of color, I argue that one's intimate life is the site of revolutionary praxis. By emphasizing bodily and affective terrains, the reader will get a sense of the texture of *la convivencia* throughout in all its multiplicity. I argue that revolutionary praxis is a continual process, and that ephemeral spaces offer us momentary glimmers of autonomous existence that can teach us more about the challenges to sustain practices of "communality" as much as they point to routes to escape old forms of subjection—by stimulating one's imagination and understanding of how such moments are cultivated, and irrespective of whether they are fleeting. I argue that temporary spaces extend our understanding of the life of radical political thought and of our understanding of revolution as a practice with real temporal quality experienced in the body and in the affect opened up by presencing its existence.

In order to understand how activists "live their politics" in ephemeral resistance spaces, we must do more than examine the possible modes of creative resistance and political subjectivities that surface from within the "cracks" of capitalism (Holloway 2010). I am interested in how activists' participation in temporary spaces enables them to experience autonomy and in how such spaces provide an avenue to critique larger

contexts, movements and envision possibilities for radical change. By foregrounding the mundane experiences or “intramovement outcomes” of direct action, I provide insight into the persistence of the “coloniality of being” which signals that colonial relations of power leave an indelible mark on lived experience and our modes of being with others (Mignolo 1995, and Maldonado-Torres 2007). The coloniality of being tempers our sense of the possible, and shows how difficult it is to break with socialized modes of being. And at the same time, I emphasize how those working to foster postcapitalist politics can actively manipulate their own subjectivity even within conditions that are “impossible,” conditions that make it imperative to recognize that resistance will only ever be partial.

This query into revolutionary time and new forms of political engagement takes on a particular valence in Puerto Rico for a few reasons. If widespread disillusionment is thought to be a new emergence, then Puerto Ricans are truly the vanguard of the new politics. Once the United States took possession of the island in 1898, the island has followed a strange trajectory becoming bound to yet not part of the United States, described in United States Supreme Court jurisprudence as “foreign in a domestic sense” to the United States (see *Downes v. Bidwell*). Even when the current political status was established in 1952, *el Estado Libre Asociado*—directly translated as free associated state but known in English by its less autonomous kin of commonwealth—then Governor Luis Muñoz Marín supported the status change, because he saw it as a temporary solution to ameliorate massive poverty on the island, not a permanent one.

This peculiar mix of being both foreign and domestic to the United States has shaped people’s sense of how to navigate politics such that most actually prefer some

form of continued association with the United States.<sup>6</sup> *I would often hear cynical retorts when I proposed sovereignty or independence might somehow lead to freedom. Oh right: free to be fucked by the IMF?* Scholars of Puerto Rican studies tend to emphasize the singular nature of the island's political situation but the fact of the matter is Puerto Ricans desire for retaining some relationship with the United States is a position is not that unique. During the last four decades most small(ish) island nations have voted to retain their complicated complicity statuses with larger nation-states while once-were colonizers now push for breaking ties with their “dependents.”<sup>7</sup>

While Puerto Rico's political structure itself floats in a time akin to “the infinite pause” read as decolonization, folks live in *la brega*—moving through the contradictions of partial incorporation. Aracadio Díaz Quiñones offers a perspective on

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<sup>6</sup> Statistically speaking, in elections for governors nearly 100% of votes are divided between the commonwealth (status quo) party or the New Progressive (statehood) party. In addition, during the last four decades (1967, 1993, and 1998, 2012), referenda held in Puerto Rico on the political status have all approved some form of continued association with the United States. There is some debate about the findings of the last two referenda (1998 and 2012). The 1998 referendum was considered by popular interpretations to be a win for “none of the above” and the 2012 a win for statehood. Those that questioned the validity of the referendum did so because of the wording and the counting of votes cast. The referendum was worded in two parts. 1. are you happy with the current status? To which over 50% voted no. 2. Which option do you prefer? The options offered were: statehood, an enhanced version of the current commonwealth or independence. No option was given for the 1998 winning category of none of the above or for the commonwealth status. While statehood won the most votes they had ever gotten in history (over 800,000), over 26% of the ballots submitted left the second question blank. Submitting blank ballots is a form of protest that has been legitimated by the Puerto Rican Supreme court who in 1993 ruled in *Sánchez Vilella and Colón Martínez v. Estado Libre Asociado et. al.* that if voters preferred option does not appear on the ballot that voters may submit a blank ballot and count them as votes that do not favor any of the available options. If these votes are counted, then statehood did not win the majority, receiving a still high 46% of the votes.

<sup>7</sup> Referenda held in Puerto Rico (1967, 1993, and 1998, 2012), Niue (1974 and 1999), the Cook Islands (1974), Mayotte (1976), the Dutch Antilles (1993 and 1994), U.S. Virgin Islands (1993), Bermuda (1995), Dutch Sint Maarten (2000), Bonaire (2004), Saba (2004), Curaçao (2005), and St Eustatius [Statia] (2005) all voted for some continued form of association to the countries they “share” sovereignty with (Baldacchino 2010, Bea 2005, McElroy & de Albuquerque 1996). One thing that stands out immediately about Puerto Rico of course, is the higher amount of times that the populace has been asked to choose a status preference, which suggests that political parties are more invested in the debate and in getting the status resolved than in other contexts. However, given that plenary power resides with the United States, these votes are less potent in realpolitik than in symbol.

“bregar,” a word used frequently in daily parlance in Puerto Rico. Much more than a simple verb, *bregar* constitutes a central habitus of Puerto Rican life which refers to dealing with something without actually making a concrete commitment to find a solution. As such, it signals a survival strategy predicated on constant negotiation. Díaz Quiñones writes, “Bregar no es una forma de ser. Es una forma de estar y no estar, un tipo no preciso de lucha, una negociación entre la ausencia y la presencia” (2000: 22). (bregar is not a way of being in the permanent sense. It is a way of being and not being temporarily, an imprecise way of struggling, a negotiation between absence and presence). As such, we can see that la *brega* is a way to be and also a way of inhabiting being. Avoiding simplistic notions of resistance, *bregar* undoes the possibility of a homogenous identification. It points to the benefits that can be incurred by living in terms of ungroundedness and oscillation.

The edited volume *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (1998) offers a complementary discussion to Díaz Quiñones’ writings of Puerto Rican strategies of resistance through the conceptual tool of *jaibería*. The editors write:

The word *jaibería* has its origins in the term *jaiba*, or mountain crab, which moves forward by going sideways. Within the Puerto Rican usage, *jaibería* refers to collective practices of nonconfrontation and evasion... of taking dominant discourse literally in order to subvert it for one’s purpose, of doing whatever one sees fit not as a head-on collision (“winning” is impossible) but a bit under the table, that is, through other means (1998: 30).

Restoring agency to a practice that nationalist thinkers have read as evidence of docility and colonized minds, the term *jaibería* suggests that Puerto Ricans are profoundly aware of the world processes and economic realities that make them suspicious about the promises of liberation through the nation-state. While both Grosfoguel and Negrón-

Muntaer's work clarifies that everyday habitus of Puerto Ricans is anything but apolitical, they fail to provide insight into the terrain of resistance enacted by activists per say. The movement spaces that I participated in during my fieldwork stay over the course of eighteen months from October 2009- May 2011 were a small fragment of an impressive history of resistance against privatization, of impressive coalition work between strong labor unions and other social movements (see Santiago-Valles 1994, Picó 1987) among the first successful environmentalist movements in the world (see Concepción 1995; Susser 1985), the internationally known struggle to get the U.S. Navy to stop bombing in Vieques (McCaffrey 2002). By examining the strategy of occupation in the contemporary moment, I show how temporary spaces can provide an avenue for rethinking the ideas of effective and transformative strategies of political participation outside the level of the state. Within this panorama, I make two key interventions. By focusing on a strategy instead of on a movement per say, I am able to identify empirical issues that span temporary spaces of resistance and to look at how the practice itself is shaped by the goals of different forms of anticapitalist struggle. Second, I clarify the tensions between each project's efforts to build autonomous spaces. In so doing, I hope to contribute to our understanding of how *la brega* shapes the emergence of revolutionary time in Puerto Rico, while clarifying its boundaries and promises.

The terrain for making these interventions is language. In my writing, I experiment with ways to narrate the possibilities emergent in ephemeral sites of resistance. As such, I am fully immersed in the question of how to write in a way that produces an unmediated sense of presence for the reader to the uncertainty and

ambivalence that underwrites revolutionary possibility and action in Puerto Rico. Since narrative is always a retrospective venture in order to develop a nonlinear narrative of resistance, I mobilize an array of ethnographic voices and strategies in an attempt to disrupt any sense of wholeness and consistency across time. In my ethnographic narration, I strive to entangle the analytic and storytelling voices by using sudden breaks and other representational strategies which I discuss in greater depth later in the introduction, in the section entitled *The Politics of Ethnographic Refusal: A Note on Writing Style*. While in some senses, this concern with representation is considered the hallmark of humanistic anthropology, I posit that it is distinct from earlier interventions in its attention to the ephemeral and to challenging the tragic affect which pervades social movement studies.

### ***A Case for Nonlinear Narratives***

Part of the reason that I have laid out this brief explanation of the sometimes contradictory and always complicated political terrain of Puerto Rico is to argue that linear notions of time and the concomitant processes of modernity and progress cannot provide insight into the motivations of grassroots resistance on the island. Writing of the 1998 referendum meant to measure Puerto Rico's status which secured a majority vote of *none of the above* over the choices of independence, statehood, commonwealth (the current status), Frances Negrón-Muntaner, argued that Puerto Rico is one of "the world's politically queerest places" (2007:1) and that the status vote for none of the above catalogues a performance of refusal based on the recognition that national governments are not able to challenge global capital. As a result of this collective



realization among island based Puerto Ricans that the future is no longer the nation-state, she writes:

...if for idiomatic reasons *ninguna de las anteriores* was immediately translated into English as the familiar phrase “none of the above,” it is actually closer in meaning to “none of the preceeding.” Invoking time as well as space, *ninguna de las anteriores* consigns the options of statehood, independence and colonialism to the past and so expresses both doubt and hope in the future. (2007: 6).

One of the important things about Negrón-Muntaner’s observation here is her claim that the available status options are anachronistic—seen as no longer really viable even if folks cannot imagine a clear outcome for the future. Puerto Rico’s alternative path to decolonization has certainly left the island in a queer space/time, and points to the utility of thinking “queerness” as a process and not merely as a descriptive term for certain bodies, communities or individual acts that do not conform to heteronormative expectations.

Given the queerness of Puerto Rico’s political status, I advocate for a nonlinear conceptualization of time when we consider how things “change” in society in general, and how people are changed by their living in the space/time of radical political action in particular. I am certainly not alone in my position regarding the limits of linear thinking. But while current social movement theorists draw from theories of the transnational (Juris and Khasnabish 2013; Juris 2008; Bandy and Smith 2005), networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Castells 1997; Hart and Negri 2004) and rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) to make claims for nonlinearity, my interest in the concept emerges from my investment in feminist theory, queer theory and critical race theory where scholars have problematized transcendental models of history by showing how the

notion of the forward movement of time rests of the marginalization and oppression of bodies whose race, class, gender and sexuality are different from the unmarked (white, male, hetero) subject. In aligning myself with these interventions, I mean to make plain the genealogical trajectories of my claims of the significance of affect and the body in efforts to understand revolution and radical praxis more broadly.

I came to be invested in developing a nonlinear narrative structure to represent the field of radical political action in Puerto Rico in two ways. First, as I worked in my *campa*, I was increasingly made aware of the porous networks and simultaneous projects being organized against privatization initiatives on the island. Second, I became obsessed with finding a way to account for the way that activists justify their work in multiple projects. *Everything is connected*. Such a claim suggests a radically distinct activist orientation to being in the world. It was tied to the fact that most Puerto Rican activists I talked with while in the field described their relationship to social justice as being in the struggle, or *estar en la lucha*. The phrase *estar en la lucha* conveys a life-long project, a dedication to changing the world that transcends any particular site of socio-political controversy. To preserve the temporal implications of struggling for social transformation implied by the phrase *estar en la lucha*, I leave *la lucha* untranslated throughout the dissertation. When we think of these ephemeral spaces as part of the panorama signaled by an activist orientation to “being in it,” then it becomes clear that these moments that are both ephemeral and ever present.

While I suggest in various moments throughout the text that these ephemeral spaces of resistance are connected—pragmatically as techniques of *lucha* and philosophically as dreams for liberation and justice—my intervention lies elsewhere. I

have struggled to develop a presentist narrative of constitutive experiences and overlapping challenges emergent in the occupation themselves, without simply absorbing them into the logic of history. I avoid being ahistorical by offering enough context for the reader to be able to understand the chapter topic and also by including a narrative chronology of each movement in Appendix A, which would serve as a good starting point for readers who would like to get an overarching panorama of each space before embarking on reading each chapter. I also include these narrative chronologies as a way of honoring the work of activists who do care, at least on some level, about what they have won and lost even though they are committed to process and to *la lucha*. However, I limit these descriptions overall in the dissertation in order to shift the emphasis of my reader's attention.<sup>8</sup> In order to get a sense of what matters, and how it changes folks, I argue that we must challenge the idea that everything can be explained by recourse to chronology. When scholars do succumb to it (see for example, Tarrow 1998), it appears as if all social justice struggles are on a path toward their inevitable decline. In de-centering chronological logics, I avoid this tendency to qualify movements as a success or failure based on whether government, policy or other structures are literally changed by their presence, emphasizing the significance of the process itself.

Chronology is an especially potent logic in normative critiques of revolution. For example, Carlos Pabón writing of the emptiness of construct of the nation and its

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<sup>8</sup> Most readers of this dissertation are probably familiar with Walter Benjamin's discussion of "Angelus Novus" the 1920 painting by Paul Klee which became the metaphor for his "angel of history" described in the ninth thesis of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. As the angel is pulled into the future by the storm known as progress he is horrified and mesmerized by the pile of debris of the past. Such a movement is what I aim to challenge by focusing on the ephemeral and the present.

persistence in Puerto Rico despite its disentanglement from political nationalism offers a poignant summary of this disillusionment as it appears in Puerto Rico. Writing about an image of Denise Quiñones, then Miss Universe waving to a group of supporters who have filled up Plaza de la Revolución in Lares—her hometown—best known as the seat of the failed insurrection known as “Lares’ Cry” (El Grito de Lares) on September 23, 1868, he writes:

“esta ‘revolución’ sin embargo, es una revolución sui generis pues el Estado colonial se mantiene intacto, la relación con los Estados Unidos continua inalterada, el capitalismo global incuestionado, la integración a la economía norteamericana sigue estrechándose, la presencia del aparato militar estadounidense, excepto en Vieques, no está amenazada, los servicios y la infraestructura pública continua deteriorándose, la política de privatización neoliberal se mantiene ascendente, la educación pública continúan en estado de coma, la destrucción ecológica no se detiene, el simulacro del ‘desarrollismo’ ese otro ‘cadáver viviente’ sigue en pie ahora vía las ‘956’, mientras el narcotráfico sostiene ‘el progreso que se vive,’ y el país se sigue convirtiendo en una isla-cárcel... con esta ‘revolución’ lo que aplica es aquel dicho que ‘todo cambia para permanecer igual’” (2002: 418).

(However, this revolution is an unique revolution because the colonial state remains intact, the relationship with the United States remains unchanged, global capitalism unquestioned, integration into the U.S. economy continues to narrow, the presence of the U.S. military machine, except in Vieques, unthreatened, services and public infrastructure continues to deteriorate, the neoliberal privatization policy remains ascendant, continuing public education comatose, ecological destruction is unstoppable, the simulacrum of 'developmentalism' that other 'living corpse' is still alive via the '956' 'while drug trafficking' keeps progress alive,' and the country is becoming an island prison ... with this 'revolution' what applies is the saying that 'everything changes to stay the same'” (my translation).

I agree with Pabón’s criticism of cultural nationalism; he is right to note that a peculiar attachment to cultural traditions and language in Puerto Rico does not fundamentally challenge socio-political or economic conditions of the island. Yet in his eagerness to

dismiss cultural nationalism, he also covers over the multiple avenues where activists contest the problems he outlines above. For example, in the larger chapter that this quote is drawn from, Pabón criticizes social movement actors for subsuming all resistance to the logic of status—taking particular issue with the Vieques struggle—but he too succumbs to the same mode of dismissing alternatives by folding the question of revolution back into cultural nationalism as a discourse that never seem to change. There is much more we can unearth about resistance by not allowing our analysis to be equally blind sighted by reasonable frustration with Puerto Rican politics as usual. Despite the fact that there have always been strong grassroots movements in Puerto Rico (particularly around labor but also in general against privatization of public services) it is extremely uncommon for activists or scholars to link the island with the descriptor radical in part because of a lack of electoral support for the independence party and also because the island has never achieved the nation-state, what has long been the sign of a successful revolution. In conforming to a linear notion of progress and ascribing such dominance to the political status question and performances of national identity untethered from radical revolt, Pabón seems to indicate a failure of the present moment and thus, eclipses possibilities that might exist for cultivating autonomy and liberation outside of these debates.

Wiegman's notion of meantime politics serves as a useful counterweight to Pabón's denouncement of the failure of nation (and by extension) of revolution. Her work was developed in a different context; writing of the loss of fervent support of the power of identity politics in the 1990s but one that produced a similar crisis of direction in feminist studies. Wiegman describes the problem of how to resist in terms of

feminists' apocalyptic vision of the future, which causes them to diagnose "...the present ... as a failure and the future is cast in apocalyptic terms" (2000:809). In this temporal formulation, duration, or the persistence of resistance is elided by feminists' nostalgia for a more radical past that has been lost in the present context of institutionalization of the field. As a result of their ideas of the past and present, a more just future is already impossible by virtue of the failure of the present.

This logic of a failure of the present pervades Pabón's criticism of Puerto Rican politics because the idea of revolution has become equivalent to state formation. Wiegman's claim for "meantime politics" provides an avenue for thinking in optimistic terms about the future when the categories we have used to understand resistance are seen to be unviable or "dead." This work is useful for my discussion of temporal experiences of occupation, in that she re-organizes the discussion of resistance away from the terms of apocalypse, which sees the present as the failure of the future, to a resolute ambiguity. Indeed, under this temporal re-ordering, she argues that we should endeavor to make the present more just, foregoing judgments about the as-yet unknown future. Her argument is that in order to remain revolutionary, this field of knowledge must remain partial, incomplete and a bit uncertain as it relates to the future.

In my writing, I am inspired by Emma Pérez's work on *The Decolonial Imaginary* is an important text which moves beyond writing stories in a linear way, but that retains a sense of hopefulness by what she recovers through her narrative (1999). In her text, Pérez argues that focused narratives can obscure crucial connections among seemingly discrete time, people, and places. Her point of attention is women, and the ways that their participation contests the colonial imaginary which drives nationalist

projects. By connecting these women across time, and through discrete periods of history, she draws an alternative narrative, a postnationalist time within colonial times. For Pérez the decolonial imaginary is that space between the colonial moment and *the imagined but not yet achieved* moment when colonized subjects are free from the psychic, material and intellectual violence of the colonial period. Important for my purposes is Pérez's claim that these moments of imaginative possibility are halting, episodic and contingent and consequently they can be hard to track or write into history. Thus, in order to get a sense of the decolonial imaginary, we must hone in on those ephemeral spaces of resistance and move across boundaries of space and time in our theorizing in order to make sense of their revolutionary capacity. Beyond identifying ephemeral spaces of resistance as part of the decolonial imaginary, I hope that this dissertation will also encourage activists to identify their social justice work as its own form of decolonial praxis. As I understand it, the project of enacting the decolonial in Puerto Rico is vital for producing increased levels of autonomy on multiple scales.

I now turn to the question of autonomy and how anthropological work on the Zapatista movement has shaped our notion of autonomous space. Placing Puerto Rico and the larger Caribbean within this literature, I advocate for attention to how autonomy is cultivated in spaces where total separation from the state is not possible. I hold that there is still a utility to mobilizing the term "revolution" because it may help to produce a belief in the possibility for achieving change that may not yet exist.

### *Zapatismo and the Autonomous Zone: Liberation Experiments in Neoliberal Times*

The alter-globalization movement<sup>9</sup> also known as the global justice movement was in many ways, the precursor to emergent practices of occupying public space and engaging in prefigurative politics in temporary encampments I have described above (see for example Pleyers 2010). Antiglobalization was a response to the consolidation of global capital and early neoliberalism policies. These actors often met infrequently, dialoguing instead over the internet. These international networks would come together usually only around the time of a major financial conference or G8 gathering and waged major protests there—their militant mobilization in Seattle in 1999, is credited as their first public presentation. A select group of social scientists have written about these networks, foremost among them is Jeffrey Juris’ work on the “cultural logics of networking” (2004; 2007). His monograph, *Networking futures: the movements against corporate globalization* (2008b) pays close attention to the way that activists try to resolve conflicts within their organization, insightfully demonstrating how they attempt to not succumb to the hierarchical ordering of the world by global capital even as they mobilize the tools of globalization.

Fewer have focused on (see for example, Williams 2008 or Smith 2004) how these movements work to achieve autonomy—both via nonhierarchical participatory process among participants and by destabilizing neoliberal economic forces. The major exception to this rule is the Zapatista case whose success at building autonomous zones

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<sup>9</sup>I mobilize the term alter-globalization instead of anti-globalization since many scholars have noted the inaccuracy of the term “anti-globalization” to describe protestors who work against the spread of global corporate capitalism. Since the very form of such activist work was the network, these activists also mobilized the tools of globalization which are not inherently bad. Instead, they really aim to contest the free market ideology that permits top-down trade and financial dictates of major organizations like The World Trade Organization, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to determine the financial futures of third world countries.



out of the reach of the Mexican state has been covered extensively by many authors since First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle in 1994 (Barmeyer 2009; Callahan 2004; Chatterton 2010; Gutierrez and Palomo 2000; Khasnabish 2008, 2010; Kingsnorth 2003; Leyva-Solano 2001; Hayden 2002; Mackelbergh 2009; Midnight notes 2001). The Zapatista movement heralded the official emergence of a new logic for enacting “revolution” as distinct from socialism and its emphasis on creating new representational structures for its claimed territories has caused scholars to rethink what radical political action looks like. Although each author’s work focuses on different dimensions of the Zapatista movement, the spatial remains a key source of agreement.

Once the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) declared a non-violent uprising against the Mexican State, their extensive use of the internet and solidarity networks that span across traditional boundaries of distance, national affiliation, etc has been a model and inspiration for others who are invested in destroying global capitalism. Some researchers have emphasized the territorial base of such movements as a vital dimension of the Zapatistas ability to foment autonomous conditions (see for example, Zibechi 2007, Escobar 2008). Others such as Stahler-Sholk argue that limiting a movement in terms of a physically bounded territory where other modes of governance exist can have the unintended effect of convert these structures into preexisting power structure. (2007:61). Following the case of the Zapatista movement, he shows how the Zapatistas responded to and averted common pitfalls of movements who strive to create autonomous communities by suddenly declaring seven new autonomous municipalities when the center of the Lacadón Jungle had been surrounded by state forces in 1994. In

addition, they have learned to negotiate with NGOs in order to acquire resources from those who wanted to site their projects in the communities or as in the creation of *caracoles* (literally shells; refers to the seat of the autonomous government). I believe that there is are worthy parallels to be made between Puerto Rican habitus of *brega* and *jaibería* in this strategy to secure financial support by all those organizations and groups who want to set up projects within Zapatista's liberated spaces. But what does it mean to wage anti-privatization struggles and demand autonomy in a case like Puerto Rico where there is no possibility for achieving permanently liberated space? As I implied at the start of this dissertation, the non-sovereign context of the Caribbean may have much to tell us about how to enact autonomy even when its duration is only impermanent. As Devon Peña (2003) has argued in other contexts, deriving one's perspective of autonomy from place based knowledge encourages self-determination based on local formulations instead of state derived, external attributes. The concept of autonomy as it is mobilized by social movement actors does not pretend to create a completely free and liberated condition from matrices of power but instead, to cultivate intentional space and to choose their own realities within a less than ideal one. Given the rise of such temporary occupations, I argue that anthropologists return to theories of the ephemeral in order to complicate scholarly analysis of current practices of popular mobilization.

### ***The Power of the Ephemeral: The Self/Subject in Intentional Space***

When studying the time politics of resistance, the ephemeral is a crucial, if understudied element for understanding the rhythm of change and possibility.

Anthropologists working on topics related to the temporality of (under)employment in a

global capitalist economy (Ralph 2008; Syring 2009) have narrated the rhythm of work (and lack thereof) with stunning elegance and creativity. But little emphasis has been given to temporality of territories of resistance per say. Consequently, I turn to Fred Moten, whose work on performance offers a window into radical ephemeral practice. In his monograph *In the Break* he covers a wide array of creative forms of and by the black subject including jazz, photography, poetry and fiction. Focusing on the practice of improvisation, Moten argues that it as a constitutive strategy of black political radicalism as much as of the black performance tradition. Indeed, he suggests that the phonic utterance, encapsulated by Frederick Douglass's account of the beating of his Aunt Hester via "the scream" is itself what makes it possible to invoke the knowledge of freedom, even as it remains unknown in experiential terms for black subjects. To inhabit the sonic form of "the break" signals a double movement, both a refusal and a transformation. As such, the punctuated temporality which serves as the rhythm of improvisation is both "without foresight... [and yet] always also operates as a kind of foreshadowing, if not prophetic description" (Moten 2003:63). He continues to explain that the break is generative because it is "...not governed by an ecstatic temporal frame wherein the present is subsumed by past and present" (64). To act from a radically embodied presence of the present Moten points to power of the sentiment inherent in resistance that prophesizes freedom. What I find useful about Moten's theory of the ephemeral for thinking through radical action in traditional terms is that it foregrounds the "moment between the moment" as other scholars I reviewed in the previous section try to do when thinking of how to redefine radical praxis after the decline of socialism. However, in contrast to the more ethnographically grounded cases I reviewed in the

previous section, Moten's work suggests that the improvised moment of resistance cannot be subsumed by the past and as such, is fundamentally liberatory as much as it unknowable.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's claim that enacting political change is as much a matter of transforming politics as it is of space (1995) I argue that ephemeral spaces offers a ground from which to enact the prophetic quality of "the break" through performance just as the presence of resistance encampments signals a refusal to suffer individually in fragmented locales. As other geographers have emphasized, following Lefebvre, space is not a container but a terrain on which social relations are produced and reproduced. Indeed, spatial dimensions are determined in the process of the making and unmaking of social relations. In coming together publically resistance encampments provide a terrain from which to intentionally inhabit the present moment without becoming paralyzed by the stagnation of the past (learned) social relations or the uncertainty of the future.

Anarchist traditions offer the most fodder of the potentialities offered by temporary spaces of resistance. A wildly popular text<sup>10</sup> among anarchists and radical activists the world over, *TAZ Temporary Autonomous Zone Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* written by Peter Lamborne Wilson published in (1985) under pen name Hakim Bey describes the process of building the "autonomous zone" as a practice for liberating society. As he emphasizes, the goal of TAZ is to co-create a reality whereby hierarchical formulations are eschewed among participants and life is

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<sup>10</sup> In the preface to the second edition, Bey notes that *T.A.Z.* had been translated into Dutch, German, French, Portuguese, Spanish (both in Spain and Latin America), Japanese, Slovenian, Turkish and Norwegian, and Croatian. (ix 1991).

structured according to the principles of conviviality and horizontality. Bey writes of the import of creating TAZ for spurring social transformation in providing a terrain to experience fleeting moments of freedom. As he explains “only the autonomous can plan autonomy, organize it, create it” (1985: 100). Anthropologists may find such a claim too utopic as it seems to affirm an idea of the self that is free from society, structures of power and interpersonal relationships. But if we take a view that is more partial, as a daily practice, then it becomes clear that Bey’s dictate is that one cultivate a sense of autonomy in order to be promote it, or create it. Recognizing the partiality of such breaks, Bey embraces and even, advocates the temporary nature of them. As such he associates *TAZ* with an “uprising” rather than a revolution, which he believes can only ever succumb to the tyranny of cyclical “revolts” a power of changing hands. In arguing thus, he is later echoed by John Holloway’s claim for “changing the world without taking power” (2002).

Although I intuitively sensed that the possibility in the spaces where I worked was a condition of their ephemerality, it was not until I returned from the field that I discovered Bey’s *TAZ*<sup>11</sup>. This is ironic, given the obvious linkages to be made between the attitude of activists toward structures of everyday life where I worked and the demand for creating autonomy by enacting it in Bey’s text. To my mind, it suggests the power of anti-anarchist sentiment on the island (a topic which I discuss in chapter four *The Limits of Ephemeral Space: la convivencia en la lucha*).

One example of the similarity between the calls made in *TAZ* and my research came near the start of my first field research trip when I asked head resident Ezekiel at

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<sup>11</sup> I thank Claudia Pederson for pointing me to this text when she heard my original dissertation title, *Building Zones of Autonomy*.

CPPP, how long he planned to stay there since the campsite's presence had long since halted the expansion of the next door Marriot hotel. He just shrugged his shoulders and said, "we have no intention of moving. Until they force us to leave, we'll stay." In line with Bey's notion of the radical openness of insurgency, Ezekiel echoes the need to "...avoid all entanglements with 'permanent solutions' (101). When I suggest that this is a political stance, possibly one connected to nationalist sentiments he disagrees. "I'm all for freedom, but I don't support these political parties." When I ask for more, he says, "Slow down. I am interested in independence and freedom. Enjoy the ocean, this beach, chat with me. We have to return to the way of the taínos, live with less and do less..." In suggesting that the temporary space provided a window through which to get to know others and oneself better, and eschewing any identification with political parties themselves, Ezekiel pointed only to his interest in developing a more autonomous existence.

What was initially most striking to me about this discussion was the fact that Ezekiel did not have a clear point of future direction or notion of progress embedded in his rationale for staying at the site. The relationship between instrumental waiting and the suspension of temporal models were not clearly differentiated in his logic. They hardly seemed to even serve as a concern for Ezekiel. That Ezekiel had no interest in moving unless the camp was forcibly displaced, presumably by state police forces suggests on the one hand, a desire to totally reject the time oriented model of legal resolution and on the other hand an instrumental waiting based on traditional models of resistance or of civil disobedience tactics for initiating legal change. Even then it seemed to me that he and others would just find another place to inhabit temporarily.

As a result of its long life, I came to think of *campa* as a squat with environmentalist orientations and not merely a direct action encampment. There have been wide spectrum of anthropological and geographic studies of squatter communities (Makhulu 2003, 2010; Pitihouse 2008; Menon 2010; Casino and Jocoy 2008; Miraftab and Wills 2005; Scheinsohn and Cabrera 2009) which describe the politics over housing and struggles over the right to space in the city. Although the term squat usually refers to occupation of buildings that are not being used by absentee owners or have been left in decay and cannot be legally inhabited, I believe that is useful to call *campa*—an occupation of land whose property ownership is contested—a squat is a useful heuristic. On the one hand, there are the temporal dimensions of it—we can’t really say that the site is a direct action because there was nothing at this stage that they were “directly” contesting. At the same time, their presence actually did re-shape and re-signifying the space they occupied in a way quite similar to traditional squatter occupations. Moreover, unlike squatting in Puerto Rican history which tended to be motivated by questions of survival and lack of accessibility of land purchases, the terrain that was *campa* was occupied in political terms as squats would be in traditional cases (see Cotto Morales 2006 for a discussion of *los rescates de terreno* or land rescue projects in history).<sup>12</sup>

Among supporters, European squatters are regarded as guardians of their country’s heritage because they take on rehabilitation of abandoned buildings. In some

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<sup>12</sup> Of course this separation between politics and survival is a bit arbitrary because a lot of the residents in *campa* that remained in the later years actually did not have any other place to live a result of their choice not to work in many instances. Even in Europe, where squatters tend to be politicized radical groups, with the financial crisis and concomitant rises in austerity measures as well as unemployment percentages, there has been an increase in squatting for strictly economic reasons.

cases, such squats can generate public support for governmental intervention to restore these buildings to their original status. In any case, squatters' occupation in Europe is clearly a strategic defense of local communities' ability to access and participate in protecting a collective right to urban heritage. Although today some efforts to turn this form of occupation into a crime, especially since there has been a rise in squatting by people who have recently been declassified, occupying is still understood among leftist progressive communities as a mode of preserving the architectural history of the city.

I call *campa* a squat in order to argue for including it within the larger definition of squatting as a strategy for defending heritage. That it began as a defense of the public's right to access the coast but over time was transformed into a distinctly agricultural space gives more substance to my claim. The island's heritage is not the plethora of decaying buildings mixed in throughout the city and across the island, visible as half-finished construction projects on beautiful cliffs, and in natural settings—instead it is its agricultural past.

Despite *campa*'s clear linkages to squatting (one of the very quintessential forms of TAZ) and a desire to exist outside the routines characteristic of everyday life in society, the sheer duration of *campa* as a space emptied it in some ways of its character as a temporary autonomous zone. However, I did get a chance to witness this intense sentiment of possibility that was characteristic of the shorter occupation in the student strike at the University of Puerto Rico in 2010. There was a sense of it being a realization of only a few moments, an extraordinary and impossible duration that adhere more strictly to the terms of TAZ. At the same, such a designation is a bit off since the students (perhaps even to a greater degree than the left-over residents at *campa*) were in



some senses, seeking recognition from the state—especially by the because its whole reason for being was predicated on the demand to be taken as stakeholders, and dialogued with by the Board of Trustees and other high level administrators of the public university system. However, in the first strike, especially before the administration conceded to begin dialogue with the striker created negotiating committee, and in the mundane moments shared inside the encampment, there was a sense that folks were aiming to build an autonomous zone. Or in the language that the students described it: *another country*.

However, the university strike did adhere to a distinct configuration of alternative spaces: heterotopia. Michel Foucault coined the concept of heterotopia in his 1967 lecture, “Of other Spaces” defining it as a countersite where one can imagine and enact radical politics. Foucault proposed it as a contrastive to utopic imaginaries which tend to fix the future and to locate the realm of possibility always outside the present. In contrast to utopia, heterotopia spaces are located in the here/now. He outlines several principles of heterotopias, of principle concern here the idea of juxtaposition, slices in time that refer at once to multiple arenas/fields of existence and accessibility, “a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them permeable” (1986: 25). As compared to T.A.Z., heterotopias see difference as foundational to its spatial configuration and are not necessarily imagined as temporary. In fact, the examples Foucault mobilizes in his lecture were a far cry from TAZ—the cemetery, the theater, retirement homes—in short, spaces of deviation that replaced the crisis spaces of “primitive societies.” Foucault argued that heterotopias were in decline and predicted that they would be replaced by the spaces of deviation. As the title of

Bey's text suggests he too is concerned with the mystical dimensions of temporary space that are usefully thought of as in dialogue with liminality, though both entail a different way of dealing with history and time.

Using the framing of the heterotopia facilitates the possibility of drawing a genealogy from the concept of liminality, coined by Arnold van Gennep (1909) but most fully developed by Victor Turner (1967). The term liminality is meant to describe the transitional states characteristic of the crisis phase Foucault mentions in his lecture on heterotopia. Turner's work on the liminal has provided enormous traction in performance studies and it is one of the few examples of a theory of the ephemeral that was born in the discipline.

Van Gennep originally coined the concept of "liminality" (1909) which refers to the transformative stage of ritual practices. As the middle stage of rites of passage, liminality was understood as a special social space "betwixt and between" (Douglas 1966) structurally determined roles, in which the usual customs and conventions do not apply, creating an atmosphere of ambiguity. The term was really expanded and developed by Victor Turner (1967, 1977) in his lifelong studies of Ndembu ritual process in Zambia. Turner described the liminal as "a realm of pure possibility" where initiates are no longer classified by their previous designation and not yet classified as new members of society (1967:97). In contrast to those who had come before him, Turner argued that liminality was a transition as opposed to a state. The movement implied in transition was the reason for its potentiality and its importance as a term.

I find the liminal to be a useful description of ephemeral space, which is marked off from everyday life, a part of but itself resolutely separate from it; which is a time of

deep reflection and works to defamiliarize what one tends to accept about society. So too, are the activists I worked with themselves liminal figures: in the university by their status as students, strikers were radically liminal and in camp, as folks who had elected to live marginal existence were also radically liminal. However, I do not find it useful as an analytic as it refers to spatial constitution in my case for two reasons. First, to my mind, there is a danger of applying ritual theory wholesale to social movements because it tends a sanitized picture of its significance, for the radicalism of the unfixed liminal period is ultimately contained within ritual itself, always serving to shore up the structure and to prepare initiates for their new role in society. That is to say, there is an inherent notion that subversion is contained and transformed into order vis-à-vis ritual processes (Dirks 1994). Catherine Bell has critiqued ritual theory by showing how discourse on ritual has served to generate and legitimate a limited and ultimately closed form of cultural analysis (1982). Turner would become less structuralist in orientation in his later years eventually, describing the liminal state as "anti-structure," connoting the relaxation of the mores and rules of the everyday social structure (1969). When he began to develop the concept of liminoid and communitas to describe western formulations of festivals and other alter(ed) spaces of gathering, I still find an assumption inherent that these spaces move society along toward a better future. While I certainly believe that temporary spaces of resistance are transformative, I take issue with the a priori assumption that liminal spaces move us "forward" through History. To rephrase, there is a linear notion of time implicit in Turner's oeuvre on liminality that follows the Hegelian dialectical mode of transcendence. In my work, I argue against such models because I think it can be a detriment to the uprising and to the redefinition

of revolution where ephemerality and impermanence cannot be subsumed within the temporal axis of transcendental history. As such, I attend to possibilities of staying in the liminal as it were in order to guide us to how radical activism can lead us to inhabiting an unfixed or “both and” position which is a basic element of decolonial praxis.

Anzaldúa’s (2002) mobilization of the term liminal as a state of being is more characteristic of my understanding of the import of liminality. She writes that bridges are:

liminal (threshold) spaces between world, spaces [she] calls *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio*. Transformations always occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries...living in this liminal zone means being in constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling (1).

This concept of liminality as an always in transition state of permanence is more analogous to my own interest in revolutionary time, that is how to go about getting people to permanently inhabit this state between worlds, (un)natural and (un)safe though it may be. In sum, while it is certainly true that in order to create a new way of being we must on some level, perform our way into being it, this dissertation is not primarily about the performative dimensions of temporary space. Instead, I aim to narrate aspects of activists’ intentions, their efforts to build alternative possibilities for autonomy in difficult situations. I do not think of these aspirations as performative, but rather as genuine experimentations. For those of us invested in building more and more zones of autonomy, I hope that such attention will help others to identify in an unprogrammatic way what might be needed in their own context to build such

possibility in another space/time. In order to position myself in this project of struggle for autonomy, I now move on to describe my position in the fieldwork and my relationship to my interlocutors.

***Diasporic crossings: Relationality in the Ethnographic Context***

My relatedness to the ethnographic context in which I worked was multilayered. For anthropologists who study political action, participant observation is a complicated matter. In my case, such tensions were further complicated by my own position as a member of the Puerto Rican diaspora and ally to the movements which I studied. In this section, I will unfold the contours of the relationship(s) I developed with my interlocutors. In addition, I will describe how my own position vis-à-vis these fictive political kin shaped my object of study as well as how I studied it. Although such comments will gesture toward the relationship between content and form, I will not fully engage the matter of writing style until the next and final section of the introduction.

At the start of my research in camp, I followed a traditional ethnographic approach engaging in long, uninterrupted sessions of “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998) with my interlocutors. This meant spending time at the campsite, sharing meals and chatting informally about myself and when invited to, also discussed my research. While some may consider this detail to be simply a question of establishing rapport and while I don’t deny that these sessions were essential for that reason, I want to underscore the difference between rapport and trust, which was itself a two-way dilemma. From my position, there was a limit to my trust for my interlocutors.

Although I did occasionally stay overnight at the site I was not a regular resident because I felt uncomfortable being the only woman staying there, a topic which I explore fully in *The Limits of Ephemeral Space*. In an effort to mitigate this distance, I found an apartment to live within a five minute walk to the campsite so I could stay late and not have to find rides or deal with public transportation.

Even such literal proximity could only bridge certain gaps. The activist-squatter residents who I got to know best always reminded me that my position was suspect. *Meli habla claro. Eres FBI?* (Be clear. Are you an FBI agent?) Such taunting seemed ridiculous to me but every time I took out my notebook or tape recorder, I would regularly be the target of (half) jokes that I could be an *infiltrado* (a spy). I quickly learned to eschew such formalities and just flow with the moments. These other moments of sharing in mundane tasks and participating in debates with allies who came to visit the site on a wide array of topics became an important mode of interlocution. But even as they got to know me and accept me, I noticed a radical shift in what they would be willing to talk about and how when I requested formal interviews. I noticed their positions on topics would literally change, becoming more rote, like reciting an official party line. At the same time, because of the intimacy of the space in camp, I often found myself in the midst of situations that I would have rather not witnessed or confided in about grievances enabled by my transitory status. Perhaps others may have decided to leave out the mundane micropolitics and contradictions between what was said and what I witnessed, but as a critical ally, I believe it is important to think holistically about what it means to struggle for justice.

While in campa, I helped to organize an anniversary celebration at the campsite, which included a photo exhibit of the early years of the campsite as a way to remind allies of all that had been achieved materially at the site. This work led me to the University of Puerto to look through newspaper archives, interviews with photojournalists, archivists at *El Nuevo Día*'s main offices and sitting in the homes of members of the coalition looking through albums and discussing the look of and structures of the campsite's coalition in the early years. I also gathered personal video and photographic images of the campsite that members of a film collective turned into a documentary known as *Compañeros de Lucha* (2011) produced and directed by Juan Dávila.

While interviewing members of the coalition and ex-residents, I found myself in the University of Puerto Rico, witness to the impending strike which I describe below. These experiences inspired me to try and organize the residents of the campsite, an effort that more or less failed. I came to realize this was a result of the differing notions of autonomy held by campa's residents and the students, which I allude to in the Appendix A history and discuss further in the conclusion.

Later on in my fieldwork, I found myself the object of informal interviews conducted by my interlocutors on me. As our rapport was strengthened and as my time in the field was nearing an end, they became increasingly concerned about what I would write and what form it would take. That my tactic of engaging the "dialogic interview" (Gray 2002) was turned on me is appropriate and points to the intellectual contributions that my interlocutors made in determining the shape of my dissertation. My interlocutors knew better than most of the dangers of publications and asked me

difficult questions about what I would do with what I saw. I didn't know really. But I talked to them about my interest in blurring genres. Having been immersed in reading *Leopard in the Sun* a novel by Laura Restrepo, I described her tactic of blending facts and fiction in order to narrate something like the reality of drug wars in her natal Columbia but not completely bound by it. I was excited by how fascinated they were by the possibility of using fiction to demonstrate a point, rather than share explicit details of it. How to blur genres and remain within the bounds of ethnographic writing appropriate for a dissertation remained a persistent concern for me throughout the writing process.

Catherine Walsh's notion of "thinking with" has informed my understanding of the relationship between my work and the ideas of both theorists and activists with whom I worked. I am mobilizing an opposition between theory and practice here as a way to categorize two different terrains of intellectual production. It should in no way be used to suggest that I believe there is a hard and fast opposition between activists and theorists. In fact, my use of the term "thinking with" regardless of who the subject is points to my belief in a parallelism between the two groups. By thinking with, I underscore that my own process of theorizing was made possible by thinking *from* and *with* social justice activists and not merely from my areas of specialization. As a result, I selectively identify one or two theorists to think through the strategy, problem or constitutive experience of occupying space that is the subject of a given chapter. These are by no means comprehensive literature reviews, but a point of entry to an intimate analysis of the struggles I witnessed. In my estimation, my



interlocutors were often more insightful analysts than those theorists I read prior to leaving for the field, so I do what I can to foreground their insights.

While based out of the main site of my research camp, I became enmeshed in the protests against the Fortuño administration. Eventually, I found myself witness to the strikes held in 2010 and 2011, nearly consecutive projects themselves the result of about a year of militant organizing on the part of students. I was fascinated by the university struggles because of my interests in direct action, temporary spaces and meantime politics. But beyond any logical justification I could provide, I was driven by an intuitive sense that this was a historic moment in the struggle for public education and I wanted to participate in it.

I didn't start out in Río Piedras as a researcher, but like others felt drawn, or even compelled to participate in what was palpably an event in the spectacular sense, even though as it was ongoing we had little sense of the effects it would generate. As such, my position was complicated further by the fact that I entered the UPR struggle as an ally and attended certain private organizing meetings to which I might have been disinvited were I clearly just "a researcher." It's difficult to say. But my position as ally first, researcher second marks an important distinction for understanding my relatedness to the context in which I worked. It also signals that the things that I wrote about there were not directed as my research was in camp but were more often, experiential and emotive. I supplemented these notes later through interviews with students, listening to radio interviews on the students' live streamed Radio Huelga (strike radio), watching YouTube videos of the various protests I attended to (as well as those I missed), bookmarking blog posts, articles published on internet news sources

like *Diálogo* and *el Rojo Gallito*, as well as collecting media reports of the strike in a scrapbook. The majority of formal interviews I collected in the UPR struggle came after the first strike was nearing its conclusion. These were mainly interviews to gather information about their life histories as activists and also included sections of dialogic exchanges based on the events I had witnessed and participated in alongside them. Contrary to my interlocutors at campa, most students wanted to be identified by their own name, and understood the documenting of their presence to be an important aspect of their work. Although I would later learn from some of the closest friends that I made there that at first they thought I could be an *infiltrado* (spy), students were overwhelmingly accepting of my presence after time, some even forgot that I wasn't a student in there as I would be reminded on the day I couldn't get into the general assembly meeting organized by the administration and the Student Council held in the Convention Center in Miramar. *Pero perate tu no eres estudiante de la yupi meli?* (Wait, so you aren't a student at the UPR?)

Over time, I'd become *yupi de corazón*, that served as a way of recognizing my belonging by virtue of my whole(heart)ed support and affective ties to the student movement. I could understand well the need to fight against a corporatist logic deciding on the future of the university as this logic always found social sciences and humanities irrelevant when compared to the sciences and other instrumentalist forms of expertise. Though the shocks were considerably less dramatic at my home institution, they were felt here as well. Top-down dictates for substantial budgetary cuts, and more attention to justifying the "need" for certain programs spread across most schools in the world. Less teaching assistantships, less guarantees, more precarity all around. As a scholar

committed to transforming systems of oppression, interested in cultivating students' disposition to engage in community work and activist projects, I recognized how my own work would likely be called into question by the dominance of certain logics about the utility of higher education in "the 21st century."

However, it is important to underscore that I did not enter the field as an activist in the movements I would come to participate in. I do not reject the category of activist for myself and hope that in future projects I would be seen as an activist by my interlocutors but I mention this distinction here because my position as a member of the community was abstract. Whereas Scheper-Hughes work on militant ethnography (1995) posits the need to reject the facile opposition of self/other from her interlocutors, I want to highlight that it was the experiences I had in the field that opened me up to another possible relationship to the work I do and where it rests in the question of grassroots resistance. As such, a great deal of what I argue in the following chapters has been textured by the conversations I had with my student interlocutors at the University who made really sharp critiques about the Fortuno administration. It is also shaped by their movement's discourse which included microanalysis of the situation the country found itself in. Their discourses were saturated with a historical depth and a particular emphasis to the ecological decline of the island as well and point to a kind of decolonial imaginary which attacked the material and spiritual havoc of colonialism directly by making links between violence against the people and a violence against the island, or of life in general. Being with them significantly shaped my understanding of the challenges facing the country and gave me some grounding, some experience with the idea of experimentation that so influenced me. I understand this work to be a

product of these collective processes even though it was not developed in collaboration. I think of their words as having equal status in developing the theoretical analysis of this text.

I imagine that my readers may now be able to intuit how the diasporic crossing informs my didactic interests in bringing Puerto Rico to bear on considerations of what we mean by revolution, and in clarifying how logics of marginalizing certain kinds of education are tied to the marginalization of certain strategies for struggling for justice. Although there is a considerable literature on the term “diaspora” and its uses, for my purposes, I follow Levitt’s definition that diaspora signals “...individuals who have been exiled or displaced...by a variety of political, economic and social forces” (2001:202). Puerto Rico’s campaigning for encouraging migration led to a mass exodus known as the “great migration” from 1945-1964 has been well-documented (Aranda 2003; Fitzpatrick 1971; Pérez 2004; Centro History Task Force 1979; Morales 1986; Duany 2002; Whalen 2005; Flores 2003). My awareness of being a product of a government sponsored migration campaign has always been a motivating force in my desire to work and live for a time, on the island. It is perhaps not surprising that the project of returning to the place I imagined being the “root” of my identity, is bound up with my political allegiances to the struggle to block privatization of public goods on the island.

Although being there was at times a painful process of recognizing the very sharp differences between my identity and those that I worked with, the notion that the island is at some level, like home, still animates my own position and my own investments in problematizing representations of the island as a place where people

don't rebel (Marqués 1972, Pedreira 1942). Moreover, even for those well informed on questions of Puerto Rican identity, migration patterns and community formations in the mainland, I believe it is essential to discuss the material conditions on the island, and to have a sense of what the shape and claims of grassroots radical activism today. It is well known that diasporic communities more fervently uphold (if also reify) the cultural traditions of the homeland, even though they may be in decline or in serious revision at "home." On some level, I hope that this dissertation will inspire more of a dialogue between the home/land and diasporic communities about rapidly changing material realities on the island and ways we might contribute to supporting and strengthening one another.

In sum, my fieldwork encounter was structured by a different logic: a meeting with an Other that is also like a different version of my own self—an other that I see as like myself even as I recognize the very limits of romantic constructions of community and the very real differences through which our realities are constituted (Johnson 2002).

A brilliant rendering of why my subject position matters and how it shapes my investment in this project comes from Laura Pérez writing of U.S. women of color's contribution to decoloniality as a theoretical concept. In her work, she argues that coalitionary politics are a necessary component of any decolonial project which aims to generate more liberatory possibility in the present moment. Her analysis of the slippage between I and You in these projects, anticipates the matter of motivated form that I describe in the following section. She writes:

What I want to argue for is a profound solidarity based on a politics of identification with the otherness of the other as an imbricated, interdependent part of our own selves and being even as it is a

recognition of the irreducible difference of the other as such... It is based on a view that is not only native to the Americas, Asia, and Africa but present possibly even in pre-Christian “pagan” and nondominant European versions of subjectivity. For me, this concept comes through Buddhism and the Maya concept of In’Laketch, *tú eres mi otro yo*, you are my other self, that has been recirculated in the Chicana/o movement of 1965 to the present, as part of an Indigenous American intellectual-spiritual-social worldview. That is, that though we are not identical, we are nonetheless also one. What this means to me is not only that your fate is tied to my own, but most to the point here that some of your own actual and seeming differences may also perhaps be part of the part of my own potential subjectivity that present power relations have rendered other or mute within me. In attending to your otherness in a way that refuses to reduce or translate it into the sameness that is the familiar to me, the possibilities of me knowing some other part of me is opened... (Pérez 2010: 124).

### ***The Politics of Ethnographic Refusal: A Note on Writing Style***

In this project, I am not interested in making temporary encampments “more familiar” to the reader but rather in unfolding “the poetics of resistance.” By poetics here, I signal the double meaning inherent in the Greek concept of *poesis*, where making and imagining occur in a symbiotic relationship. In emphasizing the “poetics” I do not mean to suggest that what follows will create a utopic representation of my field sites. Rather, in attending to the poetics of ephemeral spaces of resistance, I demonstrate how “living inside” defamiliarizes everyday social life, unfolding the process of imagining and enacting other worlds in fleeting moments of open experimentation. My goal is to narrate these moments in such a way as to transfer them to the reader as in a sensuous experience, and providing you with an analysis of the potentials and pitfalls as they emerge through different practices of cultivation. In so doing, I hope to “...nudge us toward a different affective relationship to the world and its possibilities” (Gibson Graham 2006:8).

In order to incite a different visceral response to direct action, I take an experimental approach to writing. This is not a unique strategy by any means. Since the “crisis of representation” that marked the field in the 1980s, anthropologists have become among the most sensitive and adept to questions of representation as it applies to questions of textuality and data analysis. While it is difficult to speak of a “traditional” form of ethnographic writing, especially after the writing culture debate spurred by Marcus and Fisher’s publication by the same name (1986), my rationale for engaging in narrative play is contingent on three primary reasons worth enumerating that engage practical, political and aesthetic concerns.

Taking my cue from Edouard Glissant, I write with the sense in mind that my interlocutors deserve the “right to opacity” that is to say, the right to not become completely transparent to others (1997:209). Transparency is all the more dangerous in the case of activism because academic “writing about” it can generate an unintended effect whereby “understanding of” can be used to mutilate and indeed, limit the radical potential of their work. Describing the need to shift our idea of the relation from facile and reductive comprehension and moving to a relation based on difference, Glissant argues that understanding can serve a pretext for an act of aggression which turns the other into an object of knowledge. We see a similar concern emerge from Emmanuel Levinas’ work on the “face-to-face encounter” with the other which puts the self in contact with infinity (1969). I see preserving the “density” of the other as an important practical matter for those write about activism on the most basic level because dissertations are more likely to be read by the powerful than one’s own ethnographic subjects. The surveillance that is enabled by our work could in extreme cases be used

to criminalize one's interlocutors or simply be used to develop strategies to successfully block these movements in the future.

Of course to write an opaque ethnography is not a straightforward matter. Despite the practical concerns with protecting my interlocutors' identities, for reasons I enumerate in the previous section, my decisions to provide a modicum of anonymity was also conditioned by what was desired on the part of my interlocutors. Whereas student activists by and large preferred to be named, the opposite was true in campa. I do my best to honor these wishes and readers will notice that my writing morphs at times to accommodate the preferences of each actor. Because I was also transformed by witnessing and participating in small ways with my interlocutors demonstrates my own sense of entanglement with my research subjects and a refusal to write in a way that separate out the ethnographic detail from critical analysis—which would, in my estimation, reinscribe the distance assumed between researcher and researched that is untenable in my case. A refusal to write and to represent the field in a way that reproduces a radical difference between subject/object is one way that I envision entering into this dialogue.

Of course, for writers whose identity is entangled with their object of research, the question of motivated form has always been an important one. It is not coincidental that pioneers of experimental writing forms like Deloria (1988) and Hurston (1938) were also native to their respective sites of research. My work draws inspiration from scholars whose location as neither entirely “inside” nor “outside” the cultural position from which they write, particularly in terms of the way that they have thought in careful ways about the intersections of geography, representation and identity (Glissant 1981,



1990; Césaire 1939 [2001]; Fanon 1952[1967]; Lorde 1984, Anzaldúa 1987, hooks 1981, Minh-Ha 1989; Harrison 1991; 2008). Although each of these authors' work narrates a distinct shift in the boundaries between self and other, they all follow what Kirin Narayan calls "the enactment of hybridity" which is writing that merges narrative and analysis (1993:681). My location is somewhat distinct from these authors, as I mentioned in the above section, I am neither "from" the island nor an organizer in the contexts where I lived and worked. My own rootedness was more an ideological result of my identity formation whereby the island forms an abstract referent for my homeland but was almost entirely absent from the material substance of my upbringing. Although I may be materially disconnected from these identities in the field prior to my arrival, as a member of the Puerto Rican diaspora, I understand myself to share many of the same political orientations as my interlocutors, particularly in terms of our (dis)identification with U.S. or American identity and understanding that Puerto Rico's resources should be accessible to Puerto Ricans. In other contexts this consciousness or mode of perception has been termed "borderlands" or "mestiza" consciousness (Anzaldúa 1987), "border thinking" (Mignolo 2003), "postcolonial mestizaje" (Pérez Torres 2000), and "oppositional consciousness" (Sandoval 2000) a diasporic positionality shaped by displacement and colonization.

Despite the many beautiful moments of simultaneity and connection, sometimes I experienced a radical sense of difference from my interlocutors, questions that alternatively invoked problems of locality and political orientation. To signal the movement between these positions in my writing, I use the qualifier of "we" to mark moments when our collective identity is most important. Likewise, when distinctions

mattered more, causing us to clash or when describing activities I witnessed and participated in but was neither the author of nor helped to organize but also as a way to differentiate myself from my comrades in *lucha*. These distinctions are part of the project of remaining true to our differences and our similarities throughout the text. While I underscore that my writing style is informed by my location, I am not the object of focus in my piece. With few exceptions do I become the object of focus; when I invoke autoethnographic data it is only to give substance to my difference from my interlocutors.

Following the writing of phenomenologically inclined scholars, I'm interested in developing a narrative that is concerned with the flow of practice of "occupation" in time. I center the temporal figurations constituted through temporary in the present in order to demonstrate how abstract practices are enacted at the level of being in the world (Jackson 1998, 2002; Stewart 2007). By emphasizing the excitement and possibility generated in these moments, as well as how they can be effaced on the mundane level I attempt to provide a texture of how events are experienced in the present rather than speaking from outside of that temporal moment, what we might think of as the posture of reconstruction. In those moments after, it is always simpler to reduce wins by the "push backs" and to temper possibility by cynicism. In this way, I attempt to write through the lens of revolutionary time.

The chapters which follow focus on examples that mark the openings and closures of these ideals of radical praxis. The writing is not merely an illustration of the events themselves but also is meant to reflect the particular challenges of enacting revolutionary time. Since I have sought to develop a non-linear narrative, the order in

which one opts to read the chapters matters little. Each chapter follows a linear narrative to facilitate reading. However, I do use italics to signal a break in the linearity of the narrative. In general, the reader will find three movements in these breaks: it may be as a way to refer to a temporal leap or disjuncture, a change in speaking voice or the location of the speaker. In addition, there is a recursive nature to the writing itself. That is to say, I return to key examples over and over again in each chapter but establish their significance by approaching them from different angles and locating them in different empirical issues. In this sense, I show how each issue spirals outwards into different arenas, suggesting the interrelationship of dilemmas that may at first glance, appear unrelated. Such attention has far-reaching significance for the politics of representing social justice struggles.

### ***Summary of Chapters***

In chapter 2, *Dead time is Good for Delinking*, I unfold the slow rhythm of life in temporary resistance spaces, what I call “dead time” to refer to the expansive periods of time spent doing nothing much. Since the key conceptual artifact of the dissertation is temporality, this chapter’s exploration of the time between waiting and acting that is characteristic of direct action spaces frames the rest of the dissertation. Thinking with Walter Benjamin’s notion of revolution as the “emergency brake,” I show how dead time creates distance from everyday system logics as symbolized by our relationship with the twenty-four hour clock and measuring our time within the logic of productivity and utility is a necessary precursor for creating a sense of openness to radical political possibility or “revolutionary time.”

In chapter three, *The Interconnected Futures of the Garden*, I examine the gardening projects that were started in each encampment. I argue that the gardens signal activists' effort to expand the notion of anti-privatization as well as to create a visual tool of resistance that links the fate of the island to the fate of the people. This chapter explores how gardens can initiate discussions about the failures of modernization and progress while declaring the viability of a Caribbean aesthetic in the present moment. As such, I think with Toni Morrison's notion of "re-memory" to highlight both the recovery and reinvention characteristic in revolutionary time. I also describe the limits of the garden in totally transforming food systems and practices of consumption.

In chapter four, *the Limits of Ephemeral Space*, I think with the feminist dictate that the personal is political and examine persistent problems that emerged in the living together in resistance encampments. In many ways, this chapter is about the politics of field relationships and represents the most challenging and critical tenor of this work. By honing in on the limits of the abstract formulations of community, I show the difficulty of breaking with socialized ways of being with others and strongly held ideas of what a resistance project should allow for and what it should exclude. These efforts to establish boundaries of *la lucha* are brought about by the challenge to keep a movement space alive after the buzz and excitement has begun to decline. The writing style is different from the other chapters in its tendency toward poetic narration and it is also the most autoethnographic of all chapters. I bring in the self in order to demonstrate my own complicity in reproducing inequality as well as to suggest a retrospective reenactment that might liberate us from the romanticism of resistance.

In chapter five, *Artivism: Unbounded Strategies of Consciousness-Raising*, I focus entirely on the University of Puerto Rico student strike in order to interrogate what the relationship is between art and politics. In thinking with Jacques Rancière's concept of "dissensus," I argue that these strategies or creative interventions were important in creating proliferating interpretations of the economic crisis and in bringing about new bases of membership for the activists themselves. The point of the chapter is to think about the effectivity of temporary practices of resistance that do not try and control the meaning for the viewer but instead invite them to imagine an alternative to the current crisis. This chapter is most concerned with demonstrating the power of the ephemeral as a mode of resistance.

In the conclusion, I reflect briefly on the overarching projects of autonomy being enacted in each space, and consider the tensions between projects of anticapitalist struggle emergent in Puerto Rico. I will suggest a slightly broader panorama than is evident in the body of the dissertation itself, which can read narrowly at times because of my emphasis on micropolitics. My project here is to draw out key empirical issues, and to summarize theoretical observations about the limits of the concepts of failure and success when studying social movements and other radical projects aimed at liberation.

In the epilogue *Incalculable Justice*, I consider the legal changes that push back on blossoming moments of revolutionary time that I witnessed. Interspersed in the narrative analysis of key revisions to the law which criminalize protest, readers will find a poetic invocation of the nature of justice as incalculable and the project of social justice as always in process. Following Derrida, I use these poetic asides, found in italics to suggest that the instrumentality of the law and the violence inherent in it can

never provide the venue for achieving justice. The law which always acts retrospectively cannot help us to imagine justice as it always limits us to what has been already recognized and depends on injustice to establish the boundaries of justice. As such, I question the declaration of a “win” that students made after the \$800 quota fiscal stabilization fee imposed by the university in the middle of the first strike. My purpose is to question the power of the retrospective and I suggest that even ostensibly positive concessions eclipse the possibilities made possible through ephemerality.

## **Dead Time is Good for Delinking: Occupation Rhythms in Two Resistance Encampments**

When I arrived to *el Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo*, campsite beaches for the people, in 2007 it was so quiet I wondered if anyone was even there. Stepping over a partially torn down gate leading through a parking-lot covered in graffiti, with slogans advocating sustainability and protection of the beaches, I entered into a world which looked more like a park campground site in a forest than the direct action encampment I had come to study. Over the three year span of my research visits to *campa*, I was constantly surprised by the pace of life there, which displayed no attributes like that I associated with direct action.

I thought the issue was an isolated one at first. At *campa*, activists had already occupied the acres in question for two years before I arrived. Their occupation was enabled by the ongoing court case to determine the legality of a 99 year rental contract the government had awarded to the Marriott Corporation in 1996. But then I felt it again during the early moments of the 2010 student strike at the University of Puerto Rico—organized in opposition to then recently elected Governor Luis Fortuño's massive cuts to the public university's budget. Thus, even though I had turned to the UPR strikes because I was frustrated with the slow time of the encampment on the beach, I found myself immersed in it yet again. At that moment, I realized there was more to this rhythm than I originally thought.

I must underscore the fact that the slow time of direct action is not an activist created condition, but is rather something that emerges out of the context of occupation. In both sites of my research, activists' occupation was enabled by the response, or lack thereof, to their protests by the opposing party they sought to confront. Activists and anyone who maintains an attentive eye to social justice struggles will recognize this as a tactic often used by those being challenged by a direct action to "wait out" the activists. That is to say, often when faced with a radical movement who has support from the public, the official response is to stay out of the way and let as much time pass as possible so that numbers of participants will drop and the public attention will wane, making it easier to control once the movement has lost some momentum. Usually, these periods are moments of intense surveillance. As such, radical breaks from normative time are not inherently a positive aspect of occupation but can be if participants maintain a process-oriented outlook—on acting and living in the meantime.

It became clear to me that the peculiar temporality of direct action was a vital aspect in generating the feeling of political opening in ephemeral spaces of resistance. When I asked my activist interlocutors to explain why they joined the occupation, ideas of vigilance and working without end were rarely offered as a rationale. Instead, our discussions of what was so profoundly important about being there rested somewhere else: in the energy it produced in participants, an emotional sensation of connectedness to one another that Juris has termed "affective solidarity" (2008). Indeed, that sense of affective solidarity was the most important part of braking with "the system." Here, I am invoking Walter Benjamin's notion of revolution as the act of pulling the emergency brake. In a series of unpublished notes he wrote, "Marx says that revolutions are the



locomotives of world history. But the situation may be quite different. Perhaps revolutions are not the train ride, but the human race grabbing for the emergency brake” (1975: 11).<sup>1</sup> Direct actions are ideal for considering the temporal implications of Benjamin’s claim because their goal is to literally halt the forward movement of a contentious process. After such a break is made, one aspect of what shifts on a mundane level is the routine of measuring time. Breaking with the system implies a break in the logic of productivity that provokes a shift in one’s orientation toward the world. Herein lays the radical potential the space opens up for its participants.

This chapter is a first effort to recover the temporality of direct action by closely examining what happens in the intimate moments of inhabiting a parcel of land or space claimed as territory of *lucha*. I begin my ethnography with the question of temporality instead of with history as is traditionally expected because it is a better indicator of how participants’ political subjectivities are changed as a result of living in resistance encampments. I set out to give texture to the rhythm of ephemeral space, which is radically slower than might be expected. Since so much of one’s experience of time inside bears little resemblance to ideas of hurried movement one might associate with activism, I argue that a significant, if ignored aspect of the temporality of direct action is what I call “dead time.”<sup>2</sup> As I learned the experience of being there was the most

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is an oft-cited reference made on internet pages dedicated to social justice, which became particularly prevalent once the #Occupy movement took off. I have found a single reference to it in *New German Critique*, in 1975 where it was described by author Bernd Witte in a footnote as: “An unpublished loose page in the complex of historico-philosophical theses, quoted by Rolph Tiedemann in the afterword to Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitaler des Hochkaapitalismus (Frankfurt am Main 1969), p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> In Puerto Rican history, *tiempo muerto* (dead time) referred to the off-season of sugar cane production, a period of great misery and starvation for workers. Unlike the dead time of the agricultural period, memorialized in the play *Tiempo Muerto* (1940) written by Manuel Méndez Ballester and the novel by the same name by Avelino Stanley (2000), the dead time of resistance encampments is distinct. In both

important thing for activists' in their political transformation, I began to ask, what does the slowness of direct action, the break of a resistance encampment tell us about radical political action in times of crisis? As I argued in the introduction, by focusing on the temporality of occupation, I can unfix the dominance of chronology in social movement studies, to highlight the effective attributes of "the meantime" of political action (Wiegman 2000). In addition, I can also to draw broad strokes of the political opening generated by the ephemeral quality of direct action which point to the embodied and affective dimensions of the same. Following Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*, (2007) I believe that in narrating the affective dimensions of the mundane, it is possible to inject the documentary impulses of ethnography with the poetics of human life. In this way, I hope to communicate the object of hope that came into view as I witnessed the emergence of the UPR student strike through my writing (Miyazaki 2006).

Social movement actors turn to occupation as a last resort: when dialogue has failed or has been circumvented so totally that the only way to prevent privatization from occurring or, to keep an economic plan from moving forward is to create an impasse with one's body. Important as these decisive actions are to protecting public goods, they are almost entirely absent in chronological renderings of social movements because they often do not seem to have any discernible benefit after a struggle over a particular site of controversy has ended. However, such modes of documentation provide no clear sense of what motivates activists to struggle for justice. Attention to the rhythm of occupying ephemeral space can contribute to our understanding of the way a political opening feels, reversing what Raymond Williams describes as the

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sites, activists were lead to live beyond the centrologic of capitalism" (Gibson-Graham 1996), interacting with one another in ways not guided by exchange value.

tendency to talk about the social as if it were fixed, which causes us to lose a sense of it as “forming and formative processes” (1977:128). I believe that in turning to the temporality of direct action, we can get a better sense of how these space/times matter and the way that they are inhabited when *lucha* is in process and an outcome is still, as of yet, uncertain.

### ***Dead Time and Revolutionary Time: Two Sides of the Same Coin***

Dead time is a concept I use to index the practice of passing time doing “nothing much” in resistance encampments. It was most obviously tied to *el janguero*; the hanging out that folks did as a way to pass time in the gaps that existed between the postures of “waiting” and “acting” typical of any direct action. But it also refers to a whole host of intermingling emotions embodied by the inhabitants of the encampments that are significant for understanding how their subjectivity was shaped by simply “being there.” While inside, participants feelings shift endlessly between boredom, anxiety/uncertainty,<sup>3</sup> excitement, dread and possibility. Such distinct emotions point to the negative and positive aspects of dead time which can be measured vis-à-vis the changes they produce on the level of the body.

As I alluded to in the introduction of this chapter, I left camp (in part) because I wanted to experience direct action that was unburdened by slowness characteristic of daily life there. Finding it present in both locales, I still noted that the length of time the

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<sup>3</sup> I purposely link anxiety and uncertainty because they tend to be experienced together but they create different sensations at the bodily level. Anxiety refers to that adrenaline running constantly just below the surface of one’s skin that made one jittery and unable to calm down. Whereas uncertainty is something heavier, weighted by negative feelings, most often felt when it was unclear would happen next or what would be the outcome.

occupation had been ongoing played a role in how dead time manifested itself as well as how it was dealt with. Because the body is a medium through which temporal rhythms articulate, I found that keeping in view the very length of time each movement's occupation had lasted was essential for understanding the use-value of dead time. Part of what I am arguing is that dead time retains a positive quality for those who learn how to differentiate it despite the open expanses of time contained within it. Put another way, while the durability or lifespan of a resistance encampment was predicated in some sense, on maintaining flexibility so as to avoid the imposition of a new structure, it became equally important to promote the proliferation of distinct rhythms. In short, the success of direct actions relied on the actions of many people who may be working to achieve different things all at once. Such interval movement was an important aspect of determining the utility of dead time. Although following the intersecting rhythms is beyond the scope of this chapter, I gesture toward their presence in the ethnographic narration below.

Despite the complex field through which it comes into being, a chief characteristic of dead time is the way it opens up a space for activists to appropriate time, to use it for their own ends. In his posthumous publication *Rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre defines appropriated time as that which:

...forgets time, during which time no longer counts (and is no longer counted). It arrives or emerges when an activity brings plenitude.... It has several traits of self-creation or of a gift rather than of an obligation or an imposition come from without. It is in time: it is a time, but does not reflect on it (2004: 77).

For Lefebvre, appropriated time is the time that cannot be subsumed within cyclical or linear constructions of time. By not "counting" time, appropriated moments lie outside

the regulatory pace of the 24 hour clock, and by emphasizing enjoyment (plenitude); it forces participants to occupy the present moment: the only time where enjoyment can be experienced. Appropriated time draws attention to the way that temporality is conceptualized outside abstract calculations of time. By this I refer to the idea that “is in time, is a time but cannot reflect on it,” which signals the ephemeral quality of such an appropriation—what we might think of as its temporal limits. However important these temporary breaks may be to transforming activists’ idea of the possible, their experiences are not isomorphic with the larger structure of time because they cannot fundamentally disrupt time for the entire system.

It is clear that appropriated time is based on a noncapitalist logic. I could see this non-capitalist logic reflected in every level of the occupied resistance space where *huelguistas* found ways of interacting with one another in ways not guided by exchange value. That is to say, when the need to justify what one does in the logic of productivity loosens, it is clear that most people will spend time doing things that make them feel fulfilled. When that “plenitude is self-made or given” it inevitably shifts one’s experience of time. To my mind, the difference between dead time and appropriated time is the former is the condition while the latter serves as the action or manifestation enabled by dead time. Dead time creates the space for activist creativity and imagination to emerge.

By prioritizing enjoyment over other concerns in how to spend one’s time, activist experiences may not easily map onto the traditional bifurcation between productive and unproductive uses of time. To give something of a texture to the distinctions between a dead time that becomes undifferentiated and dead time that can

exist as an interval, I will divide the chapter into two major sections: focusing first on undifferentiated dead time in campa and then dead time as interval in the University of Puerto Rico strike. In my concluding thoughts, *Delinking from Systemic Logics in Ephemeral Space*, I return to discuss the import of dead time in cultivating a revolutionary disposition to process and a willingness to work for decolonial futures.

### ***El Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo: The Waiting that (never?) Ends***

Campa was founded in 2005 in order to block the construction of The Marriott Residence Inn—a 15-floor condominium of 196 private units—to be built on public lands. While the battle to establish legal standing continues, the campsite lives on in the meantime: a space fraught with ambivalence. Today, only a few men remain there, inhabiting three acres of beachfront property suspended between visits to the appellate court and planning events to regain the fleeting public attention. It's a long gap of time, measured by the small window that one has to fall asleep between the end of night flights and the rising morning sun **so hot** inside windowless tents that one awakens startled, in fear of asphyxiation. Since campa is located just behind the airport, there is a constant noise of planes landing and taking off **so loud** that at meetings we'd have to stop talking or resign ourselves to repetition. I found it ironic that the peacefulness generated there was always interrupted by the noise pollution of planes—*wrrrrrrr*—unsavory symbol of the island's economic sustenance. Thus, although the pace of activist organizing has almost slowed to a halt, I know the men who stay there don't sleep well, a common fate of those who occupy a place not meant to be home. Palatable as the beach is to fantasies of unending relaxation, it can be easy to miss the way body's

rhythm is tormented by the constant living in an idyllic landscape, the daily attack of bugs at the beginning of sunset till its last rays have disappeared from the horizon.

The ability of the body to withstand such slow trauma is limited. The breakdown of a body so disrupted by the noises, it can no longer find rest. For example, Ezekiel, the head of the campsite never gets more than a couple hours of uninterrupted sleep. As he tried to convince me to stay early on, he promised my safety: *porque el sueño del guerrero es sagrado*.<sup>4</sup> But on the days I do stay, I think of the lack of sanctity of one's sleep. I see this warrior, walking the perimeter, often sleepless, just one level below full awareness, always on the lookout for the next infiltration. An orientation to being in the world that seems to be without end.

Full time residency only works for those who are beholden to nothing and no one. Perhaps predictably, enjoyment featured as a central aspect of their work and their resistance. Indeed, the philosophy of many activists who resided at campa was based on enjoying life, and they were very protective of their time, of living life on their own terms. Most are dismissive of these men. Even those who love them see their work as child's play, as if living in never-never land. Glancing around first to make sure she won't be overheard, she whispers, "they are just a few crazy [men] that are there for the adventure." Still, it's remarkable that they continue to protect the space with their bodies. A kind of dedication that hardly gets positive recognition anymore.

Campa is one of the rare direct action spaces that made it past the daily confrontations with the police to a tense truce, until the decision is made in the courts. Ironically, its very success has made it virtually invisible to most of the island. Living in

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<sup>4</sup> A warrior's sleep is sacred (my translation).

dead time is bittersweet for the people of campa. Such time is marked by an increasing realization that the Marriott has begun to encroach on the site: setting up jet skis in front of the site, installing two bright lights that prevent residents from enjoying a bit of darkness at night.

The land carries on better than the residents. Those who arrive for the first time or after a long absence were consistently awed by its beauty and pulled into an alternate rhythm—an alternate sense of possibility. Vegetation overwhelms the senses—tall pine trees, almond trees, papaya, endemic orchids and other plants that mark it clearly as a reforested bit of costal land—perhaps the best record of the success of occupation, of what was planted in the birth, growth and peak phase of the movement as well as the last thing that generates efficacy in the present. Just after the Marriott’s developer, HR properties cut down the trees and laid concrete, activists organized a planting brigade, to begin the process of reforestation. The changes in the landscape today are evidence of the way that the space’s existence led many to appropriate time, even if the lack of consistent high numbers of residents points to the temporary time frame of such escapes. Today, the dunes have returned, largely because there is a state sponsored plow that passes every morning to flatten the sand and make it more palatable for tourists. Plants and grasses have grown wild; not only do they protect the beach from erosion, they are also evidence of the maritime zone.<sup>5</sup> Their natural growth patterns show blatantly the large and unwieldy space it is meant to encompass.

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<sup>5</sup> One of the main sources of controversy regarding coastal construction projects is how to determine the boundaries of the maritime zone. While the law itself defines the zone in very broad terms to refer to the entire area that is covered by the sea during its ebb and flow, a stricter definition is usually applied. In the area of Isla Verde alone, a majority of buildings are thought to actually be constructed in the maritime zone (zmt). The first law governing the coastal zone was “La Ley de Muelles y Puertos” brought in by



Days always begin the same. A cycle, marked in time with the natural rising and falling of the sun, begins with the job of making coffee for the crew. Other than this repeating act, the days were filled in whatever way residents desired. I initially had difficulty understanding this open rhythm. Ezekiel would often shrug off my efforts to interview him as soon as I arrived, saying, *Ve y goza nena, tu sabes lo q hay* (Go and enjoy yourself girl, you know what's up). A reminder of the same aspiration appeared spray painted on the concrete barriers erected between Campa's occupied space and the Marriott's parking lot: "We are here protecting the public access to the beach, enjoy it in peace and harmony." After many attempts, another looks at me with pity and offers,

To get to the people, you have to go with the flow. It's slower than you might imagine. You can't force-feed people. That's the imperialist way. It creates docile subjects, people who are willing to accept blows, who grow up expecting them. You build with them, burn with them, joke around (*vacila*), flow.

His point was that the only way to arrive at an alternative future was through letting go of one's expectations and one's timeline. Even if one is committed to radical change, pushing one's goals on another is seen as another reproduction of colonialist relations and thus, antithetical to the struggle for liberation.

*Campa* was a remarkable node in a diverse panorama of Puerto Rican life.

Visitors literally came from a whole spectrum of class, racial and political backgrounds.

I met police officers coming to the beach on a Sunday with their family, old defenders

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Spain 1880 and was later updated in 1968. It defines ZMT in the following terms: "The area of the coast that is covered by the sea ... including those sensitive to tidal shifts and the largest waves in the period where storms cause higher waves and including reclaimed land and river banks." (El espacio de las costas de Puerto Rico que baña el mar en su flujo y reflujo, en donde son sensibles las mareas, y las mayores olas en los temporales en donde las mareas no son sensibles, e incluye los terrenos ganados al mar y las márgenes de los ríos hasta el sitio en que sean navegables o se hagan sensibles las mareas.) See Feliciano, Diana. 2008 "Analysis of the ZMT: Towards a New Definition. *In* Revista Jurídica Universidad Interamericana De Puerto Rico 42 Rev. Jur. U.I.P.R. 451

of the Puerto Rican independence movement, politicians like the recently elected mayor of Old San Juan, Carmen Yulín, or Rogelio Figueroa García, founder of the political party Puerto Rico for Puerto Ricans, of tourists who wandered in from the beach. Although there was obviously a predisposition for allies to be from the “left,” visitors could be anyone from the travelling musician, “gringo” hippy looking for a place to crash for the night, or a wealthy local who lived in one of the nearby high rise condominiums. I could see that “direct action” served as a referent for why people had come together, but in daily life, dead time was a crucial element in constructing community. Enjoying oneself rested on a critique of the normative demands of a 24 hour clock: based on the idea that every moment is quantifiable and that we should fill our time with measurable acts of productivity. Instead, activist-squatters emphasized being with others and we spent our days somewhere between intense debates over the political future of the island, and joking around—engaging in *el vacilón*.

It is significant to note the double meaning of *vacilar* in Puerto Rico. The first refers to a great party or a great time: we do this *por el vacilón*—because we enjoy it. *Campa* certainly served as a space for celebration. The most common gatherings were those that celebrated the return or departure of some ally or comrade. Once a year, we could count on enjoying a massive celebration in March near the anniversary of the encampment’s founding. Impromptu celebrations also paid homage to the residents. These occurred when a particularly kind or generous beach goer included residents in their hanging out, as thanks for their being there. But *vacilar* also means to vacillate, a doubting movement, back and forth without being located anywhere; it is this other

definition that points to the underside of enjoyment: a perpetual liminality that is unrelenting.

It's hard to tell what kind of alternation between slowing down and speeding up is needed to make dead time useful for one's political growth. The qualitative experience of dead time as an alternative rhythm to everyday life loses its feel without the events that give occupation a pulse, a sensation that you are doing something. After all, too much dead time can be... deadening. Such a feeling was wont to accumulate in the "winter" season, when locals did not really frequent the beaches, finding the slight chill in the water to be unappealing. When the visits from once residents and those in solidarity lagged, a concomitant sense of dragging on permeated the atmosphere.

At first, the rhythm was enticing; some have reported it as a stuckness: "I get here, and I don't want to leave." But, it is easy for one's purpose and vision to fade inside. Many of the floaters—the majority of the population of *campa* is part-time, visiting for months at a time, and then disappearing for months on end—return empty, driven back by a deep affection, apologetic, they say: *el campá me quita mucha energía* (*campa* takes away my energy).

Only some of this draining feeling could be attributed to the lack of directionality in this space. Lack of intertwined, simultaneous rhythms also plays a role. By this I mean to signal a waning sense of differentiated time: those who are responsible for pulling together events, for organizing, for promoting the cause in the media all live outside the space and thus, these rhythms seem almost obsolete, disentangled from any goal. Perhaps most important was the lack of constant, open debate about the outcome we hoped for, the future that kept us there—even if its

boundaries were unclear. Instead, direct questions never fully answered but I found them return again in unexpected moments. Rumors have a distinct utility in the end of a cycle, after a place has extended long past a break we might identify as temporary, standing in as an explanatory power for why so few people remain.

***Yupi:*<sup>6</sup> *The time that will never come again***

I thought that going to stay in the university encampment would mean constant action, a welcome respite from the rhythm I struggled to flow into at campa. While it was true that the student strikes located me in an earlier moment of direct action, witness to the growth and the peak of the occupation, I found a profoundly pedestrian sense inside the gates even when I arrived in mid-morning, on April 21, the first day of the 48 hour stoppage. The action to take over the campus was successful.<sup>7</sup> *There's always a tendency in me to conflate success with nonviolence but as Isamar's Facebook post on the one year anniversary of the strike, the early moments were militant and did require an aggression that was not characteristic of the strike itself. The ones who were*

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<sup>6</sup> YUPI is a very common nickname for the University of Puerto Rico, although its most commonly used to refer to the Río Piedras campus where I worked. It's a phonetic spelling of the first two letters of the acronym U P (the R is dropped).

<sup>7</sup> This takeover was enabled by La Política de No Confrontación, the policy of no-confrontation (PNC) which was first ratified by the Academic Senate of Río Piedras in 1991-1992 under *La Certificación Num, 49*. PNC establishes dialogue as the mode for resolving conflict in the university instead of confrontation with the police. The rector J. Fernandez passed PNC in order to avoid violent encounters between the police and the student body. This policy sought to break with a legacy of violent attacks when strikes were organized by students at the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras campus (1971, 81). Two cases are referenced in the language of the policy and in the everyday talk about this history of encounters between police and student protestors most frequently: 1. On March 11, 1971, a violent encounter ends with three dead: the commander of the police's riot squad, one of his team and a cadet from the ROTC (Cadet Training Corps reserve officer). In addition, there were thirteen people who were hit with bullets in the scuffle, forty-nine wounded by stones and sixty-five arrests. The encounter happened in the Student Center when a fight broke out between ROTC cadets and student activists who were carrying out a struggle to evict the ROTC from campus on the same day that students had organized an activity held to remember student Antonia Martinez Lagares who was murdered by officers the year prior.

*doing the nightshift yelled around 6am “They arrived!” And everyone ran—some to wash up and others who couldn’t be bothered. We all arrived running to the gate and we saw how the police (campus public safety) wanted to get back at us (se querían tirar una venganza). Many of us were perplexed since it was our first time confronting the police. Others ran to the front to keep the officers from passing through the gates. There was even a guy who grabbed one of the officer’s nightsticks (macana) in order to prevent him from passing through.*

Once inside, students and allies alike sat around on the grass, talking informally about what to do. We watched the picketing going on outside the gates: a massive mobilization of union workers, professors, everyday citizens in response to the more five hundred students inside. Surrounding them were media teams from all the major news and radio stations with the best equipment set up in front of the gates. By mid-day, we found out that instead of responding to students’ demands for a meeting, the interim chancellor, Ana Guadalupe, declared an indefinite administrative and academic recess of the campus. This was widely interpreted as a strategy to avoid dealing with the issue, to wait students out instead of addressing their concerns.

In arriving, I had entered through the pedestrian gate, which was unlocked. Later in the day, the police also tried to block these entrances to prevent the flow of traffic, inside and out. They wound up in the middle of a mass of people who were linked together. No one could move. The police got stuck inside their own barrier. After about 15 minutes, the police were able to break free. One grabbed by the neck and then pepper sprayed a female student (Rosaly Mota Marquez) who was standing close by, causing a rapid dispersion of folks gathered around the gate. Over the course of the 62 day

occupation, moments like this would become less frequent. Still, they served to punctuate the dead time this movement effectively produced.

Meetings were called by seasoned activists of leftist organizations *until the strike had gained a bit of speed, these folks really were the primary organizers* at each gate to decide what to do. Students were resolute in their desire to stay on for however long it took for the administration to pay attention to them. I sat with them in front of the museum, some seated on the ground, others standing together in a massive huddle. One female student remarked, “Here we have the capacity to hold conferences, to organize workshops. We’re not just here for the stoppage; we are here defending public education, so let’s educate ourselves. They think we’re not going to stay because we want to be at the beach, hanging out, relaxing.” *I think of my boys in campa and think how funny it is that even here, the beach serves as an opposition to the landscape of struggle.* Eventually, students at each gate which would later become homes of separate, if interlinked autonomous communities voted unanimously to stay. Afterwards, there was a scramble to set up these camps.

Amidst the uncertainty, people began to discover the bounty of the surrounding landscape. One day, as I walked with a group of students through the campus, led by Ana Elisa who was showing us the different plants and trees inside she remarked, “Did you know? It is illegal to plant trees that give fruit on campus.” We could understand why: there were only two mango trees inside campus and their ripe fruits were usually left rotting after being run over by cars filled with students hurrying to their next class. But as one student told me the discovery of these trees was born out of necessity, “In the beginning, we didn’t know what we were doing: people were riding bicycles around

giving out mangoes because we didn't have food." Indeed, at each "pantry" area of an encampment's kitchen one could find a cardboard box filled with these intensely sweet mangoes, a pale yellow tinted with orange, often covered in little black spots—battle scars of the fall. Most were so small they could fit in the palm of one's hand. On my time away from the strike, I ask others who had completed their studies at the university if they could remember the mango trees, and without exception, they could not.

After students made the decision to *stay* indefinitely, the feeling of anticipation briefly increased, but nothing *happened*. As I walked around aimlessly, I met other folks who were also there in anticipation of the moments to come. Mongoose, an artist from *La Escuela de Artes Plásticas*, a public art university (EAP) explained the sense of attraction it held for him as we sat on the ledge between the train stop and the museum:

It's like if you really wanna know why I'm here it's because I secretly hope some crazy shit will go down. Sometimes I wonder if it's all irrelevant, like if I'm irrelevant. This small island, this short moment in time. You know, what does it even mean?

Many like Mongoose were driven there by anticipation that such a moment would give them a feeling of purpose, of a place from which to act. They were hoping for something to shake them out of a sense of perpetual frustration, and a sense of impotence in the face of massive economic powers.

Eventually, anticipation gave way to boredom. Part of the boredom seemed to be a result of experiencing time in a new way—in its emptiness without all the repetitive rhythms covering over it. Although in a university, bodies don't move according to the disciplining bell of primary school, if one stands and waits, it's possible to observe the imaginary bells, in the break(s) where sudden mass of students bustle across the lawns

moving to lunch, dorm rooms, work or to another class. Inside the first strike, these rhythms were readily discarded and for those who were not in leadership positions or busy working security, this meant inhabiting a long stretch of open time. In fact, only around daily meetings at their base, or for larger plenary sessions would any mass movement come back into view, if only temporarily and only partially since there was no penalty for arriving late. In practice, this meant that students would arrive in their own time, and leave as they pleased. Although plenary sessions were not celebrated by all, it still was an important part of creating a sense of open dialogue. Even those who floated in and out of these sessions listened in and would reflect on them in smaller forums, their ideas always making their way back to the larger session.

Openness to improvisation and to discovery was an essential part of the process of occupying the campus. Giovanni, leader of student, movement echoed the characteristics Lefebvre outlined as conditions of appropriated time when he explained to me the significance that this process didn't come from the outside. "At first, things were all over the place. But after about a week, we'd wake up at more or less the same time, eat together at more or less the same time; a balance was established." He saw the routine as part of the rhythm of the strike. He explained further that the gap in expectations produced out of the strike also allowed for people to find the roles and activities they wanted to perform, contributing how they saw fit. "In this sense, the benefit of occupying a space is that it breaks with the alienation created by a structure that comes from outside."

Inhabiting dead time enabled all kinds of unexpected discoveries, not just of oneself but of the campus itself. Moments like climbing the clock tower and seeing the



handwriting of others, as early as 1910. Being inside the clock tower writing Revolution 2010 for others to find later. Away from the battlegrounds, and the stress, arriving up above was one of the most beautiful things. The windy steps, the darkness. They channeled that forgotten energy and connected with others who came before. The campus became another country. They replaced the American Flag with the gay flag, and hung a purple and white banner down the middle that read: *razones sobran para luchar* (more than enough reasons to struggle).

Political possibility needs a space to emerge from, just as much as it needs *time* to consolidate. As one student told me, “the stability of the occupation created flexible conditions for participating which created a higher percent of participation across the student body.” Even those students who had to leave campus for personal responsibilities would live inside the camp. If they couldn’t be around during the day, they would at night. A perpetual cycling in and out: up and over the gates one enters into a (new) homespace at the interval that makes sense. Fitting it inside other rhythms when necessary. But, more often, the strike eclipsed everything else.

When I asked Elisa to select a quality, a moment, that was indicative of the feeling of the students’ occupation of the campus, she turned to the mundane: the sense of being with others and the feeling of singularity that permeated the atmosphere of the university campus during these 62 days. “What I found most exciting” she told me “is the living together.” She laughs before continuing,

I’m addicted to the strike. I love the companionship, the good feelings between people, In short: the atmosphere we create. It’s really beautiful to wake up in the morning to light conversation (political usually!), free

food (ha) and there's always lots of little things going on. It's like this thing you know is so special it's impossible to imagine it happening again.

Elisa's words convey a potent feeling of being hooked to "the inside" of strike life unable to imagine missing a single second. It suggests an affective disposition to giving up everything to belong to a historical moment.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, this mode of engaging intensely with those involved, and hardly at all with those who were not, gave way to an undifferentiated sense of time. The days blurred into one another; even my field notes fell into a very different rhythm. Instead of writing each day, I would sometimes go days without writing in my notebook by the time the strike had been gathering steam for over one month. Even then, at regular intervals, I'd be overtaken by the urge to write something down, forgoing the methodical aspects of starting an entry on a new page, dating the entry and describing where I was. In those furious times, I would scribble notes, sometimes leaving incomplete sentences and thoughts as if interrupted by the intensity of the present moment.

But this phenomenon was not limited to my notes. Slowly, many strikers fell out of touch with the outside world. Although I did not conduct a survey to confirm exact numbers, nearly every student I interviewed either lost or quit their jobs during the strike. As Sebastian asked me what kind of cell phone charger I had, I was reminded of how rote tasks like keeping one's battery charged up felt foreign, an afterthought until

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<sup>8</sup> This sense of the university strike never happening again turned out to be true. After the \$800 fee was imposed for the second semester, students organized another strike. It was significantly debilitated by a constant en masse police presence on campus and riot police and swat team members who regularly dispersed peaceful activities by students in a repressive manner—arresting and beating people up daily. Students were told that their free speech could only be guaranteed in an area marked off by a banner that read, "Area of Public Expression" which was flanked by police on either side.

the battery was already dead. Today, Sebastian confides in me: “Meli, I hope I didn’t lose my job. It’s been two days and I haven’t even called in.” Some may cringe at this incident, finding nothing transformative, only evidence of the typical twin pair of youth and irresponsibility! But what it really signals is a shift in the locus of responsibility. Sebastian’s sense of accountability shifted away from those at his job in favor of other *huelguistas* (strikers). Such behavior suggests a shift in attention away from a structured, abstract notion of time that keeps one so occupied that one has no time to imagine other possibilities for change. The danger, the sudden realization always came with the knowledge that time would march on, unmoved by the temporary exit of hundreds of student from its grips.

When I asked why or rather, how it could be possible to lose one’s sense of time, I would only receive a rather amorphous explanations amounting to the same thing: the clock did not seem to mark time in the same way. Instead, the routines established by the students themselves—morning picketing, plenary sessions and dreaming of a new country through informal debates strategizing best ways to achieve an outcome amenable to all—seemed to be the only thing structuring time. In this space/time, mundane acts were shot through with educational effects suggested by the most repeated moniker of the strike: “I learned more during the strike than I did in all the years I attended the university.”

Such changed experiences of time had a physical underside: an unending sense of tiredness began overtake the body. Although days moved slowly, they languished on for hours and hours. There were few opportunities for rest: a result of uncomfortable sleeping conditions and little sleep at all, combined with a constant stream of adrenaline

always present. As feelings of singularity and joy became engulfed by ambivalence and frustration students began to turn to other ways to contract time, to turn away from subtle if unending attacks such uncertainty produced. Hanging out in the bars outside the gates became a way to deal with frustrating moments. Ironically, these breaks also contributed to this sense of exhaustion, an increasingly pronounced slow trauma of the body.

One very important space for activists-strikers was *el Refugio* (the refuge) which turned out to be just that, a meeting point—a retreat. A haven, even. Everyone started their nights there. If you went in the early afternoon, as I have done for countless interviews, its quiet, shady and almost something approaching cool difficult to find in Río Piedras during the summertime. The main seating area is outside but discrete, covered from the street by a wooden fence and shrubbery. To get there, you have to walk inside through the bar, which can take some skillful navigation if you arrive later in the evening. Stepping out again, you come to the coveted area where many of the tables have benches and table tops covered in a multi-colored tile, a space perfect for group gatherings. The Christmas lights all year round keep the place enveloped by a colorful glow. Their style combined with the plants and fountains give the bar a distinctly rustic feel. Occasional old salsa tracks punctuate the sound of excited chatting and folks sometimes break from heated discussions to sing along.

*El Refugio* was a refuge because it provided a physical separation from the strike: not in terms of who was there because during the strike, *el Refugio* was mostly filled with strikers. Rather, being there brought a break in the sometimes overwhelming sense of adrenaline threatening to engulf whatever tranquility that one felt whenever

things weren't happening in the encampment. Here it was possible not to worry about a surprise attack. Leaving the space lifted the sense of dread that always permeated below the surface. Hanging out postponed the feeling of uncertainty and increased a sense of togetherness. Thus, these moments strengthened a sense of camaraderie between strikers. It built that sense of family that Waldemiro Vélez mentioned to me in his throw away description of hanging out: "it became important in those moments when, resolute in our decision to stay and fight but stinky and exhausted, we needed like any other family to talk shit and have fun" that other ways could not.

Perhaps because of this need to separate strike life from hanging out in their own minds, some of my collaborators—particularly those who were very much concerned with contesting the popular representation of strikers as lazy kids who didn't want to graduate—didn't like talking about the hanging out they did. They judged such moments to be an unfavorable counterpoint to "the real" work of strike life, whereby students seem to be totally occupied by planning events, workshops and other educational soirees. Like Waldemiro, they thought *el jangueo* was not important and that it served as nothing more than a way to kill time. I think its use-value is signaled by these comments precisely because hanging out, surely a routine, and part of the rhythm of strike life, was essential for maintaining a space for open dialogue, fun and to contract the sense that time did not pass at all inside the gates. It also has to do breaking apart the idea of activism as action, sometimes the not-acting, the returning to what young people did on Thursday nights was an important part of maintaining a sense of themselves.

Ironically, whenever there was a threat that the police would attack students or try to evict them from the campus earlier feelings of openness, and anticipation would suddenly reappear stronger than ever. As one student explained tried to explain, “such moments made me feel strangely determined, it made me feel important.” It seemed that such possibility was made tenable through moments of violence. Days like May 14, when the police ordered that no food/drink could be passed through the gates to the students. By early morning, a cell phone video went viral that showed a father being beat up and arrested by police for attempting to pass water and breakfast to his son across the gates. The incident provoked huge turnout. My friends called, asking what I needed and came just in order to sneak food over to us. Police were unable to cover all the areas of the fence; by mid-afternoon, a friend brought over a sandwich to me right at the front gate. Challenging the prohibitions of the state became like a game, a fun way to pass the time.

Giovanni Roberto, a student leader felt ambivalent about the way such moments of resolute dedication emerged as a result of the threat of eviction or fear of violence:

The sad thing about this is fact is that we are dependent on the threat of the state to motivate our decision to occupy a space. The state marks our passage, we’re reacting and not involved in creation for its own sake. We need to unite for our own good, but it doesn’t motivate like the threat of confrontation does.

Giovanni points to a desire for engaging in resistance for its own sake, pointing to the fact that the work of fighting for social justice must be proactive and not just reactive. His concern was that if efforts to build alternatives only emerge in moments of conflict, they are also more likely to fall away once the state’s interest wanes. Still, the threat of confrontation did mark a clear distinction between this movement and others—the

privilege of recognition—that made it clear how different it feels to be inside the epicenter,<sup>9</sup> a model of occupation against which the others will be measured.

### ***Delinking from Systemic Logics in Ephemeral Space***

Although system breaks can never be total, the rhythm of life in a direct action points to the sensing and knowing that is radically different from what is available in other moments. By closely examining the role of dead time, I have suggested that its utility lies in the opening it offers to those who flow into it. It offers a route to “delink” (Mignolo 2002) from the limits imposed by living our lives according to the demands of a 24 hour clock and abstract measurements which fit within it. Such breaks generate awareness of the immobility that one faces in everyday life, even if people eventually have to return to the everyday, it is this de-linking which is transformative and suggestive of an alternative possibility. It signals a possible future that is not merely bound up with changing status quo on the level of the state but is interested in creating the future in the now/here. A decolonization of the terms of decolonization if you will, moving away from placing all one’s attention on the political status in order to begin the long process of de-linking with those structures that maintain island and one’s very being in a sense of perpetual colonization.

Attention to process instead of end goals, as an interlocutor suggested, was what was changed in him as a result of his participation in the strike. In answering what he saw as an ideal future for the island or outcome of *la lucha*:

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<sup>9</sup> The university was an epicenter of social struggle in at least two ways: 1. it became a model for a country frustrated by the dead end of politics and 2. The Río Piedras campus where I worked served as a model for the other campuses that joined in the strike after the 48 hour stoppage was met with silence on the part of the administration.

The significance or value of struggle is not in what we aspire to do but rather in the construction/in the doing itself. I don't want to arrive anywhere. Clearly, it's obvious that we need goals...but the process definitely changed my way of seeing things.

Ricardo's reflection conveys a clear shift toward valorizing process over outcomes in his understanding of the goal of social struggle. His words suggest he has moved away from seeing things in a narrow mode, whereby struggles begin and die with the site where one is fighting. Instead of accepting the fragmentation such thinking suggests, one vacillates through the process that moves toward a project of escaping certainties and familiar formulas.

Putting questions of sustainability and extramovement outcomes aside for the time being, it is clear that dead time and the process of enacting intentional communities may foment long term social transformation by re-invigorating the logic of revolutionary time. In Fanny Söderbäck's recent publication entitled "Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporal Return" appeared in a special issue of *Signs on Unfinished Revolutions* (2012) she defines revolutionary time as one that which, "...opens new doors into a future not already governed by the past—depends on a nonidealizing and continuously interrogative movement of return to the past as well as a chance to experience the dynamic and active processes of the present as they unfold" (302). This tenuous balance between remembering the past while not being limited by it was echoed by one of my interlocutors, Marimer explained revolutionary time as profoundly disorienting: "Between confusion, tiredness and uncertainty, my passion for acting [for change]...encouraged me to live and to be, in that particular moment, in which we knew something would happen, but we did not know exactly what." Inhabiting this sense of



disorientation is essential for breaking with linear notions of time which prevent an openness to future unknown possibilities.

As Ricardo suggested in his valorization of process over outcomes, revolutionary time rests less on the fact that there are achievements and that things do happen, and it matters immensely how they happen. To argue that revolution is not a bundle of accomplishments but a process, makes it possible to understand why dead time and ephemeral spaces reinvigorate the terms of a de-colonial project. They require that we think differently about our time, how much of it we “have” and what to do with it as much as it requires that we strive to make life more enjoyable while we do it. We have to do the work of destroying and creating within a context that helps us feel fulfilled and happy now instead of exhausted and burnt out.

Ephemeral spaces and the unfixed possibilities they create, help participants to get past strict notions of rationality to push the limits of thought so much so that they can be shaken from expectations, and find the world anew. What I will show in the rest of the dissertation is that while there is a great similarity between prefigurative political action and decolonial praxis, they are not the same. While prefigurative politics rightly emphasizes the present moment as the only time to enact imagined possibilities, decolonial praxis recognizes that the only way to create the future in the present is by holding past inequalities in view and returning to them when necessary in order to cultivate the prefigurative present moment of liberation. In the following chapters, I will interrogate the degree to which activists inhabiting and acting in ephemeral space, are able to cultivate decolonial praxis.

## THE INTERCONNECTED FUTURES OF THE GARDEN: PLANTING AS A TOOL OF RESISTANCE

This chapter follows the rise of gardening projects in the two occupations I studied and shows how the turn to planting became a means to connect the struggle against privatization of public goods to ecological futures. Since neither the student strike nor *la Coalición Playas Pa'l Pueblo* (the coalition beaches for the people) responsible for organizing *campa*, was explicitly organized around the question of agricultural rights, I became intrigued by the appearance of small scale farming initiatives there. When I asked activists to explain their purpose in both sites, both groups of activists claimed that planting was *una herramienta de lucha* (a tool of resistance). In this chapter, I argue that activists' mobilization of gardening as a strategy of occupation suggests a transformation in the discourse around anti-privatization struggles. The "time politics" of this shift is significant as it suggests that in order to be effective social justice workers, we must consider the ecological implications of economic crisis. Activists integrated gardening into their movements because they understood that processes of displacement and expropriation sustained privatization writ large and that in order to successfully block the privatization of public goods, they had to cultivate modes of contesting the ecological decline of the island.

Through gardening projects, nourishment (*alimentarse*) became a useful medium for activists' efforts to transform their movements on material and discursive terrains. The garden literally changed the look of the occupations themselves, enabling activists

to contest stereotypical notions of direct action as a fundamentally destructive project and to emphasize their character as transformative spaces where it was possible to actively create the conditions for changing the status quo. Gardening served as a site for cultivating autonomy, shifting from an abstract claim for recognition of the “the people” in the case of CPPP and “for the university” in the case of the student strike to practices of building a rooted revolution. Indeed, the garden served as an image of and practice for revolution that shifted the locus of autonomy to the self via the land. In this sense, activists suggested that a solution to current erosions of autonomy lay in cultivating skills to become better prepared for embodying autonomy and not just in denouncing what they saw as an erosion to autonomy, meted out in terms of declining conditions of accessibility to public goods. In both cases, the garden enabled the movement of revolutionary time via a return to and revision of the past which established a development model of the island that analogized progress with urban development, disassociating the ecological from the political. In this context, the strategy of planting as a tool of resistance to global capitalism broadly, and privatization of public goods in particular became an entry for enacting decolonial praxis because it posits an intersectional future that includes the future of the is(land) and with other sentient beings we share the earth with in the possibility of social justice. That is to say, it places ecology on equal footing to society, advocating the production and consumption of local goods over imported ones. As Angela García showed in her recent work on addiction and dispossession in the Río Grande valley, we must not underestimate the potential for healing that becomes available to those who reconnect with land via mundane processes of care taking like gardening (2010). Since the garden

served an example of the interconnected futures of ecological and political horizons, it represents a shift in consciousness about what it will take to become autonomous. The garden itself carried its own power to instigate memories and imaginaries of the past by making tenable the forgotten agricultural landscape of the island in unlikely urban spaces. As such, greening the movement visually reminded activists and onlookers alike of the ecological potential of the island. The garden offered a reminder that there could be an “outside” to a system predicated on dependency and alienation.

On another level, small reminders of the island’s potential seemed irrelevant in the face of the overwhelming statistical evidence of the island’s dependency on the United States. Puerto Rico imports more than 80% of its food from the United States (Office of Agricultural Statistics 2008). Myrna Comas notes that Puerto Rico has no official food security policy and that food reserves are not clearly defined, combined with high dependence on imported foods and maritime routes that coincide with hurricane paths (Comas 2009). Puerto Rico has to rent merchant ships from the United States to import food as well as to export everything produced on the island (Comas 2009:42). Activists suggested an inverse relationship between autonomy and dependency: in order to increase autonomy, it was necessary to lessen dependency on outside systems. Thus, although the gardens were small and could not literally feed the whole movement, let alone the whole island, they did serve as tools of preparation so that we might inhabit those alternative configurations of the future(s) that were as of now, nearly inconceivable.

In what follows, I provide brief histories of the gardening projects, specifying the conditions which brought them into being in each occupation. These histories are

important because they point to different ways that gardening became integrated in movements which ostensibly had nothing to do with agriculture at all. As such, these histories suggest the myriad ways that gardening might serve as a tool of resistance. Then, I consider how the garden becomes a tool for re-invigorating the logic of revolutionary time by “re-membering” the past (Morrison 1987) adding a decolonial drive to what make seem to be a simple project of recovery and imagination. In particular, I explore how the act of gardening enabled activists to re-imagine and reclaim the iconic figure of *el jíbaro*. Although *el jíbaro* literally translates to “a person of the forest” Puerto Ricans will recognize the polysemic nature of the term, which can sometimes refer to the Puerto Rican people themselves, or to a particular class of agricultural workers whose livelihood was decimated by the PPD which held their image as central to the “national project.” It is the latter definition that my interlocutors most often referred to and to which I refer in the duration of this text. I argue that gardening projects were important aspects of the occupations which sought to recover broken memories, histories that were cast out because they disrupt the official discourses and unfulfilled promises of progress through partial integration into the United States (Díaz Quiñones 1993). Intermingled within this discussion of the potentialities inspired by the garden, I also underscore the limits of these re-memories, showing why they could not fully change the daily patterns of consumption of either squatter-activists or student strikers.

Limitations aside, I believe that gardening and other strategies which sought to reinvigorate the possibility of returning to the past while also shaping it in the present, are essential to the project of engaging in decolonial praxis in order to develop a more

autonomous existence. Thus, by way of conclusion, I examine one student's claim that the garden was "the cradle of quantum sovereignty" in order to argue that the garden served as a nonlinear locus of revolutionary time. Our discussions about the unknowability of matter and the Heisenberg uncertainty principles open an avenue for discussing the possibility inherent in any moment are vital for thinking through my claim that ephemeral spaces create a political possibility through the embodied experiences occasioned by participating in them.

### ***From Occupied Space to Reforested Place: El Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo***

Greening the land where *campa* was sited was an integral part of activists' struggle to contest the construction of the Marriott Residence Inn—a 15 floor condominium with 196 apartments, to be built immediately next to the Marriott Courtyard, which already is itself something of a tourist compound complete with a casino, restaurant and multi-floor parking garage. Before the encampment was founded, activists began to protest the proposed expansion of the Marriott Courtyard because the Residence Inn was being built on lands that had been zoned public since 1965. Although the lands were technically a part of the Carolina's public bathing area which it bordered, these acres had not been developed as the others had. As such, the Marriott didn't own the lands, but had secured a 99-year rental contract for the property from the Government of Puerto Rico which had been awarded to them in 1995, nine years before construction began. Some activists suggested that the Government was just trying to make some easy money in offering the land to the Marriott.

On March 4, 2005, just days prior to their occupation in 2005, a coalition of groups led by Jessica Rodriguez, esq., held a press conference on the lands and denounced the fact that Marriott's developer, HR Properties' had already begun construction removal of massive amounts of sand from the acres in question, as well as, cutting approximately 100 almond and pine trees without securing appropriate permits to do so. Moreover, HR Properties had not submitted an environmental impact statement (DIA) to *la Administración de Reglamentos y Permisos* (Regulation and Permits Administration; ARPE) to show that they had investigated the potential harm their development project could cause. When the press conference did not deter developers from continuing their construction project, activists organized "Operation Pick and Shovel" and dug up the concrete Marriot had lain to begin construction. They made a banner offering discarded concrete chunks to the public for free.

Activists' actions generated consciousness over the controversy and there was a widespread public outrage over government authorized long-term lease of the lands that effectively made the Marriott a defacto owner of public lands.<sup>1</sup> Just a few days after "Operation Pick and Shovel" was held, the coalition group which had formed to contest Marriott's development project held a massive march, *de mar y tierra* (from land to sea) which was held on March 13, 2005. Activists kayaked, walked, biked and swam the entire length of the public bathing area to symbolize the connection between this parcel of land and the public bathing area that was immediately attached to it. When the march culminated in front of the Marriott, they tried confronting the manager of operations there who dismissed their protest and as Imac Morales told me, dared them

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<sup>1</sup> For details on a similar controversy concerning the Hilton Corporation, see Fernós 2008 and see *Compañeros de Lucha 2011* for video clips of the news coverage of the controversy.

to try and prevent the construction project. Consequently, a group of activists decided to occupy the space. At the same time, the supporting members of the coalition included a legal team from the UPR's environmental law clinic spearheaded by attorneys Pedro Saade and Erika Fontáñez Torres secured an injunction paralyzing the project while the legality of the rental contract was debated in the courts.

Soon after the encampment was founded, activists organized a planting brigade to replace the trees that had been cut down: a project that has continued both formally and informally into the present. It was this process of planting itself that transformed the space from something of an abstraction to an intimate home place. At the first planting brigade, both activists and children planted almond trees, pine trees and even planted a ceiba tree in honor of Tony Croatta, a recognized singer and supporter of independence for Puerto Rico who had recently died. *La ceiba* is recognizable by the unmistakable thick conical thorns that grown in clusters on the trunk. Some species can grow to 230 feet tall or more, with a straight, largely branchless trunk that culminates in a huge, spreading canopy, and buttress roots that can be rise out of the ground, towering over six feet. *La ceiba* is considered the national tree of Puerto Rico and the supporters of the campsite are well known advocates for independence. But planting it at the entrance of the campsite was a practical strategy more than anything else: as a national tree, it is illegal to cut down so activists understood this siting of the tree to provide a permanent green space, no matter what the final outcome of their struggle would be.

By the time I arrived to conduct preliminary investigations in 2007, it was difficult to imagine what the campsite looked like in 2005. After just two years of activists' occupation, camp had become a beautiful green space, sparsely dotted with



colorful tents and other features of a homespace: kitchen area, hotplate and canned foods but mostly just trees, and grass. Sand that moved as it wanted to, collecting around chairs and other furniture. The unwieldy movement of sand unfettered, created a stark contrast to the manicured beaches around it, whose dunes were plowed flat to facilitate easy walking for tourists and were lined with beach chairs for rent.

Successes aside, many began to tease that the handful of activists who remained at the site were nothing more than “ambientalistos” a play on the word environmentalist, shifted to include *listo*, a term for sly or shifty, alleging that these activists lived off the struggle and had no business staying on after so many years. This attitude was mostly a response to what many had come to see as a directionless movement. As one coalition member told me, “the case has been paralyzed in the courts. Why do they feel they need to stay here?”

The reasons were mixed. Some felt that if they left, the Marriott would just push through construction plans as they had in 2005. In addition, I learned that some of the residents had no other residence to live in, and as such, the encampment served as their only home.

Over time, the campsite was used as a storage and dumping ground. I remember being shocked to see a refrigerator at the campsite, but grew accustomed to the strange items I came into contact with while visiting the campsite. The combination of a massive amount of non-functional goods gifted to the campsite over the years and these items brought about negative publicity and discord within the movement. *A discord never fully eradicated which instead got played out in the garden. One day, Felix angrily summed up the perspective of those who did not help in the daily care for the*

*garden, “the making of this place beautiful and all that bullshit is really not what matters here. This is a protest space, not a home garden,” thus privileging the occupation as a strategy, and lessening the emphasis on it as a struggle to create a new community.*

*La Granja Ecológica de Isla Verde* (the ecological farm project of Isla Verde), was an effort to address the sense that the occupation had gone on too long and that it lacked a clear purpose. According to some ex-residents, the potential for transforming this small parcel of land into a space of cultivation came about as a surprise. As Carlos told me, “We wanted to use the space for something good. We started to notice how well things grew there. I mean, the vegetation was amazing.”

Materials for the garden project were collected from other people’s trash: this included using items strewn about at the campsite—a wheelbarrow whose wheels were rusty and rotting, used as flower bed, pvc pipes as legs to prop up workspaces, a torn cover up to serve as a canopy for the nursery, bamboo for *everything*, plastic gallon bottles, used to transport water from the stored gathered rainwater to the kitchen sink tank and for other odds and ends. These materials were supplemented by collecting wood and boxes for work spaces that were discarded by big stores like Home Depot and Wal-Mart regularly.

The two men who spearheaded the project: Ivan and Bieke were long time activists. They both became involved in activist work in Vieques, a small island off the coast of the main island of Puerto Rico that for over thirty years was the site of U.S. Navy war games and bombing exercises. This is no surprise if one considers the history of the coalition itself—the major membership in the early years from Amigos del

M.A.R. who was one of the responsible parties for setting up the encampments in the bombing zone in the early 2000s. As a result of the destruction they saw there and their individual interest and investments in agriculture, they become invested in using camp as a forum for generating consciousness of the sheer food insecurity of the island. In particular, they believed the gardening project could serve as a way to educate young children about gardening from neighboring impoverished communities. Bieke hoped that this project would cultivate their intellect and leadership abilities and perhaps even inspire in them love for agriculture.

Going against the recommendation of other scientists and agricultural workers, who claimed that nothing could grow on the beach, they planted flowers like the orchids which lined the path to the beach and *damas de noche* (night blooming cestrum) whose jasmine smell wafted across the terrain at night. In the days prior to the workshop, we built boxes, filled them with soil donated from the University of Puerto Rico and got seedlings donated from various allies of the campsite. On December 19, 2009, the actual day of the planting, Ivan and Bieke brought in children from nearby communities of beach-side community Piñones and public housing project Llorens Torres to participate in the event. Although the education project was largely symbolic as the area was already prepared and the children were only responsible for transferring the plant from their pots to be laid into ready-made holes in the soil, the children were very intent on their task and took it very seriously. They filled about four boxes with the quintessential “kitchen garden:” tomatoes, basil, peppers and, oregano, *recao*

(culantro)—items which form the base of most Puerto Rican dishes.<sup>2</sup> Although the idea was to expand the education project, no other workshop was held officially until about a year later, planned by different folks entirely—a result of a confluence of factors, including a disagreement between the two founders, and Bieke being kicked out of the campsite. Still, these boxes forever changed the image of the campsite, nourishing an idea of resistance based on cultivation and sustenance.

After the first failed education gardening project, no regular care of the plants could be established. *The discord between members was reflected in the plants, which flourished immediately following a planting brigade and would within the span of two months have died. Wilted plants, dried from the sun, suffocated by winding weeds that overwhelmed them. The plants suffering revealed the interrupted cycle of care and neglect.* Planting brigades continued but happened spontaneously, whenever a plant was donated or found. Thus, the garden grew haphazardly, without a design. I found myself comparing its haphazard design to the search for autonomy itself, a persistent project of experimentation without a map. Later additions were both functional and aesthetic: including lemongrass—a strong plant that takes easily to the ground needs little care. Its long grass expanded rapidly. Since it is a natural insect repellent, we would grab bits of it and rub it on ourselves near sunset the hour of the insects' attack. Other endemic plants of the coastline slowly began to grow on their own, adding depth to that which was intentionally planted.

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<sup>2</sup> The first publication that promoted the return to the practice of keeping a kitchen garden in one's home was published by Nelson Alvarez Febles in 1984. *El huerto casero: Manual de agricultura orgánica*. While I was in Puerto Rico, garden projects were spreading all over the island. Some organizations like Taller Salud (health workshop) were using the projects as a means for bridging generation gaps and others for community projects to raise money as in the case of The Community Garden of Capetillo.

A year or so later, the garden project came to life again when an old member returned to stay at the campsite after a long absence. As a guerilla gardener, he preferred to not be recognized for the work he did. He explained to me that he was glad to be able to assist in the next phase of the gardening project. “We know what level of commitment they can make to the space. Now what we have to do is work with that.” Thus, during his stay, he focused on planting things that could survive with little need for daily maintenance, like papaya trees, *verdólaga* (purslane), root vegetables and some medicinal plants that were as strong as weeds.

But, in *campa*, responsibility for caring for the garden project never expanded beyond a small group. While everyone recognized that the garden project restored the damaged image of *campa* to the public, no sense of collective responsibility for the gardening project formed. I would often hear the members who did not participate in the care of the plants showing it off to visitors. They would take ownership for the project, identifying it as work of the collective. There was always a rift between those that focused on the gardening project and the others.

### ***Building another country: The Strike Garden***

When students took over the Río Piedras campus on April 21, 2010, they had already been engaged in a struggle against Governor Fortuño’s austerity measures for over a year, organizing with public sector workers in opposition to emergency law 7, major layoffs and severe budgetary cuts to the public university system. On the Río Piedras campus, students had also organized action committees to begin building a movement from the ground up, literally, subverting the traditional avenues available to

them, like *el consejo de estudiantes* (the student council). Consequently, students regularly analogized the university with the country, wielding the catch phrase, *la UPR es un país* (the UPR is a country). They sought to highlight how the dilemmas that students faced at the university were interconnected with daily dilemmas that citizens faced in their everyday life as well as to create another country as an example of what could be.

Students maintained this posture throughout the duration of the strike, even when they were the targets of extreme violence. An excerpt from a student speech given on July 18, 2010 at the march against repression, held in repudiation of violent acts committed by officers against students on June 30, 2010<sup>3</sup> in front of the capitol building demonstrates this mirror analysis:

Comrades, our people, our country is falling apart and we are all affected. Violence has many faces... We live under attack. We are beaten every day, while reading the newspaper every morning, when another tree is cut, and another dies. Every day of uncertainty [is another violent act like] every law amended in the dark while the people sleep.

The emphasis in this quote is on violence but it aims to shift attention from a single act of extraordinary violence by enumerating the invisible violence of daily life. What I find significant about this quote is that it reflects the student movement's position that disparate problems are symptomatic of one another. In a context where people have come together to contest an outrageous repressive act, students encouraged their allies to consider the relationship between the violence committed against the protestors that

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<sup>3</sup> The march against repression was organized as after an action held on June 30 known as "take back the legislature," a group of approximately two hundred protestors descended on the capitol building to symbolically back the legislature because it was the last day of the session and the legislature had to vote on the government budget. Students' planned to read a statement to the legislature and hold a march outside but were instead met with extreme police aggression against both the small delegate who tried to go inside and those waiting outside. The police actions quickly spread into a chaotic riot outside. Participants were senselessly beaten pepper sprayed and shot at with rubber bullets.

day and their own lives. The effort to turn a violent aberration into a common occurrence is evidence of their drive to break people's sense of separation from one another

Student's attention to interconnection bewitched onlookers. An early headline published by one of the most conservative papers on the island, *El Nuevo Día* (the new day), described strikers in otherworldly terms: "Inside the campus, students operate on a different air." Mesmerized by students, newspapers recorded their every move—an attention other prefigurative struggles might only dream of receiving from mainstream media.

Early coverage of the strike followed students doing their own maintenance of the university grounds. Pictures and videos of students recycling, and sweeping the sidewalks became news—folks shocked at what could be cultivated intentionally. *Still, I can't get the image out of my head of Alejandra in the first days of the strike leaning over a big plate of hamburgers and hot dogs, getting ready to distribute these all-American and super processed meals to her compatriots in the struggle.* Images of students getting around by foot or bicycles stood in stark contrast to actual modes of travel on the island and heightened a public sense of the sheer difference of things inside the gates. Excessive urban sprawl and variably regulated construction in Puerto Rico have made it nearly impossible to get anywhere without a vehicle.

In light of these facts, it is perhaps not surprising that students founded strike garden on May 4, 2010, about two weeks after the start of the strike. The strike garden was one manifestation of this ecological practice of caring for place and for each other that challenged the notion that there was nothing "useful" about occupation. Moreover,

it contested popular stereotypes of student activists as lazy kids who participated in the strikes because they “didn’t want to graduate.”

One of the key visionaries of the strike garden was Ana Elisa Pérez-Quintero, an environmentalist with an amazing record of achievements. She started working for ecological justice when she was 15 years old. By age 18, she had founded *Grupos Ambientales Interdisciplinarios Aliados* (Interdisciplinary Alliance of Environmental Groups; GAIA), a non-profit organization dedicated to developing a curriculum to promote a culture of eco-citizenry in primary school. As a part of her work with the alliance, Ana Elisa had already helped to develop three urban gardens that served as a hands-on laboratory for students and an incubator for new environmental campaigns.

Despite her impressive organizing record, Ana Elisa eschewed responsibility for the garden. Like every project undertaken in the first strike, it was an outgrowth of a collaboration spearheaded by herself, a recently graduated alumna Katia, and Edgardo Alvarado: a respected farmer and president of Boricuá: The Puerto Rican Eco-Organic Agriculture Organization. Boricuá is a nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to educate Puerto Ricans about ecological agriculture in the hopes of stimulating environmental conservation projects. They regularly organized working brigades on organic farms which provide labor to small farms while disseminating traditional agricultural knowledge to the public.

Boricuá’s interest in supporting the student movement was spurred by the idea of “making food grow everywhere.” As Ana Elisa explained, Edgardo wanted to contribute to the student movement by teaching activists how to do agriculture. In his view, if students were interested in constructing a new country, it would have to do be



done by also making the land anew. Edgardo's notion of building something new by returning to past traditions fits within the recursive movement revolutionary time, what Fanny Söderbäck calls the need for a "perpetual return" (2010).

Despite early discussions about developing an alliance between the two groups, students did not realize the farmers' intention of constructing an actual garden on university grounds since Boricuá's projects had always been performed on already developed agricultural lands. But, when Ivan Quintero arrived with three trays of seedlings and small plants, a gift from himself and another farmer named Raúl, students quickly learned the plans were much more literal.

They decided to site the garden in front of the iconic university tower, one of the few green spaces not occupied by an autonomous camp and perfectly situated between Humanities and Fine Arts: two of the camps that the majority of the caretakers of the garden were based. Its location in the middle of everything added to the image of the "other country" the student strikers were building. As Ana Elisa explained, "The gardening project is a political act, it responds to the question of what type of university we want—an education that is hands on, that leads to you think critically and to experiment." This learning might best be described as environmentalist learning, an awakening of a different understanding of one's body. Although this was a subtle aspect of the gardening project, its meaning came into view through participation. *There were limits to the way we could embody this learning. Jameil suggests one day that we make food with the fruits of the garden. But no one knows how to experiment with it. How to improvise. We wind up making a pasta and laugh that the main substance of our meal still didn't come from the harvest.*

On the day the garden was planted, it took a couple of hours for the area to be prepared for the workshop proper. We all participated in digging up grass, carrying over wheelbarrows full of soil and bushels of hay to the main area. The manicured grass all around this open plot took on a different quality suddenly appearing artificial as never before. The working pace was slow. While one or two dug up the ground, others waited till they received instructions. This pace was syncopated by a steady pulse of over one hundred people that entered and left the space at will. 100 names on a hand-written register document their presence. *There's never more than a handful of folks here at any given time. Jameil describes his exacerbation at being included in the collective discourse but not in the collective work. "We wanted this to be a work of the collective, not something we were responsible for and no one else. Everyone liked talking about the garden, but no one liked really working there." Ana Elisa confirmed the lack of integration, but was less critical in her approach, "I'm not sure if people knew how to approach us."*

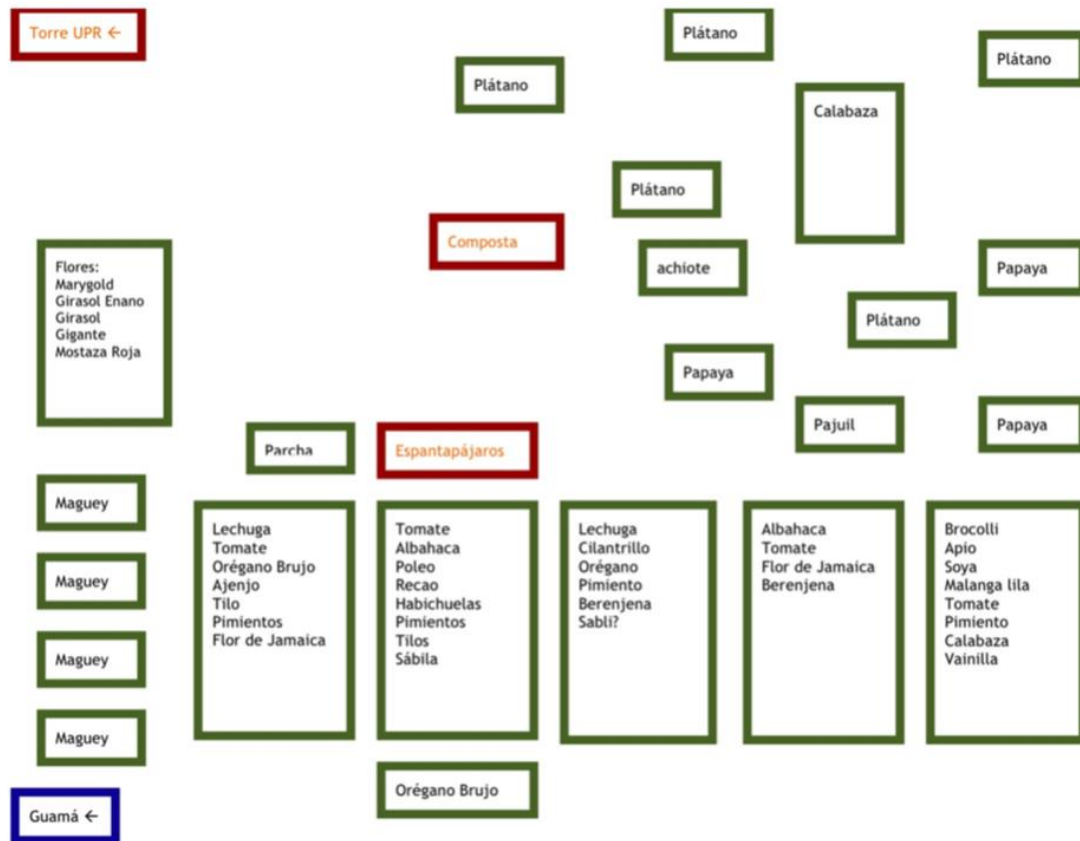
When I stopped from time to time to look around, I noticed a group of observers and onlookers that stood on the margins of the garden. Some pointed from the roadway, others stood closer still, under one of the two large trees on the boundary between the sidewalk and the garden. But, regardless of the distance or proximity they were visibly excited by the project. Some even took photographs.

When the workshop began, I noticed it was led by Alejandro, an agronomist I met in campa who helped in the consultation process of the garden project there in various stages. He began by providing a basic science lesson on how plants grow, explaining the process of photosynthesis and the interconnected nature of each step in

the process. He then gave general instructions on how to plant a garden anywhere one would like one: specifying the ideal dimension for the plot, how deep to dig and the how to make best use of bugs and how to vary combinations of plants in any given plot so that if there were a plague of insects, it could not destroy the whole garden. When I asked him why he structured the workshop in this way, he told me that, “It’s part of a project to begin disseminating knowledge of agriculture all around so that people see it can be done anywhere, not just on a farm.” This idea of planting food anywhere pointed to a distinction between the romanticization of the process of knowledge recovery and of the tendency to isolate farming to certain landscapes, and by extension, lives.

After the land was prepared and the short lesson finished, participants were instructed to “grab a plant” and find a suitable place for it. The participants’ intent school like focus was transformed into childlike excitement as bodies clustered together along the sides of the plot. Some squatted while others kneeled; each person made a hole in the dirt with their hands and carefully twisted the plastic pots off the seedlings, dropping them into the ground. We planted a wide array of traditional foods, medicinal herbs and spices and even *apio* (celeriac). “I don’t know if it’ll take here,” Edgardo said, “but it’s worth a try.” At first, he just explained how to insert it into the soil, reminding us to look for the direction of the root (*buscar la vuelta de la raíz*). Suddenly, as an afterthought, he added, “the deeper you plant it the better” suggesting that the further down we could go, the more likely it would be to survive.

The below image charts the garden layout at the end of the day.



(image courtesy of Huerto Huelga)

**FIGURE 1: *Huerto Huelga* Map**

*As soon as the strike was lifted, strike garden was the first thing to go. The administration ordered laborers to dig it up. Some plants were saved and taken to the nearby community garden in Capetillo, but the visual reminder of intersectional futures, intersectional struggles was gone.*

### ***Future Past: Recovering Jíbaro Practices***

As we have seen, the gardening projects clearly shifted the look of occupation and they demonstrated that activists understood that acquiring tools to care for the land and make food grow everywhere was fundamentally interlinked with the project of defending “the public.” In this section, I think with Toni Morrison’s concept of “re-memory” (Morrison 1987) to analyze how the garden implicated the recursive turn of revolutionary time and in so doing, shifted the larger meaning of autonomy and liberation implied in and sought after in *lucha*. I draw on Morrison’s work here instead of the many social scientists who theorize memory for a few important reasons. In distinction from social scientific understandings of how memory works, Morrison suggests that the memory itself is held in space, in the places our ancestors have inhabited.<sup>4</sup> It is significant to note that her notion of rememory is a noun; and as such, it suggests that rememory is a material thing as much as it acknowledges the creative process implicit in remembering. Second, Morrison uses the term to describe the things that remember, over which we have no control. Once something we have a memory of exists as a picture in our mind, it goes on living. In *Beloved*, the main character Sethe is able to access past realities through re-memory, which might best be described as the place between recollection and reconstruction. When Sethe explains rememory to Denver, she offers the following example.

If a house burns down, its gone, but the place-the picture of it-stays... out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think about it, even if I die,

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<sup>4</sup> One significant exception to this is to be found in the Aboriginal concept of the dreamtime which posits that every event leaves a record in the land. However, I tend to think of this less as “memory” work and more as a claim to the relationship between place and creation since topographical elements in the landscape are explained through stories about spiritual beings.

the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened (36).

One of the things I suggest by using the term re-memory when describing the garden, is that as a strategy the garden works to remind people of the re-memory of the island's agricultural past. Through the garden, it becomes possible to remake that past in the present moment. Because of the way that the garden implicated a return to the past in order to heal what had been lost by "progress" and development, I argue that the garden energized decolonial praxis. By recuperating traditional practices without romanticizing the past, it suggests one successful mode of enacting revolutionary time.

In order to provide my reader with a sense of what past was implicated in the garden, I begin with some historical background on the consolidation of the present commonwealth status known in Spanish as *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA). The commonwealth was created in 1952; a result of a joint plan between the United States government and the island's first popularly elected Governor Luis Muñoz Marín. ELA was understood as a step towards increased autonomy, but maintained a tie to the U.S. so that as to first "rescue" the populous from poverty and create industry on the island.

Operation Bootstrap (*manos a la obra*) was the signature development project of the new status which was meant to bring the island out of poverty and into "modernity." Bootstrap rapidly changed the look of the island by displacing large-scale agricultural production of sugarcane and tobacco for industrial factories mainly in the areas of pharmaceutical and chemical development, and electronic products. To entice U.S. companies, the Puerto Rican government offered tax-free profits, differential rental rates and subsidies to U.S. based companies who in exchange helped to build the

infrastructure necessary for building industrial facilities (Maldonado 1997). Many scholars have noted that this development project served as an important predecessor of the export based industrialization program known as the *maquiladora* model (Baver 1993; Dietz 1986; Pantojas García 1990; Pérez 2004). As one might expect, the people most affected by *manos a la obra* were the *jíbaros*, a people who lived off of the land, cultivating agricultural products and who mainly lived in the interior of the island.

Ironically, it was Luis Muñoz-Marín who first brought *los jíbaros* into the political process. He was the first politician who travelled through the interior of the island to organize the populous. In the late 1930s, at the start of his political career, Luis Muñoz-Marín began a successful campaign for senator. He encouraged them to vote honestly and to not accept bribes from politicians, which was the most common way of securing votes in the past (Córdova 2008). Muñoz-Marín eventually founded a political party known as *El Partido Popular Democrático de Puerto Rico* (The Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico). The PPD became known as *el partido de la pava* (the party of the pava) in reference to the straw hat that *jíbaros* wore and was known by the slogan, *pan, tierra, y libertad* (bread, land and liberty) which represented his interest in improving the living conditions of the people. Although Muñoz-Marín had a fervently well intentioned interest in improving the standard of living of Puerto Ricans, the development project Operation Bootstrap accelerated the destruction of the island. Instead of “saving” the *jíbaro* from poverty, these projects brought about rapid decline in agricultural production, causing mass scale displacements exacerbated by long-standing patterns of landlessness and poverty among agrarian workers (see García-Colón 2009 for a history of early land reform projects spearheaded by the PPD).

Thus, although ELA was first imagined as a temporary step on the way to independence, it has become something of a permanent status for the island, and there is little clarity on how the situation will be resolved at this juncture. As I describe in the introduction, today, the majority of Puerto Ricans support some continued form of association with the United States. In spite of the fact that Operation Bootstrap was touted as an economic miracle, over time it only exacerbated high unemployment rates and produced ever declining windows of opportunity for agrarian development.

Activists seemed to be channeling the history of past inequalities that have fomented dependency when they spoke of the garden. For example, Jameil, one of the members of the strike garden care collective, spoke of feeling newly tied to the land as a result of his gardening work. In fact, in his undergraduate thesis—written for a double major in ecology and anthropology—he described the gardening project as something new that was simultaneously old. “I say new because any connection to the earth is so far from today’s cultural hegemony that it made me remember a time when we valued the land. A time of palpable patriotism overflowing in the streets” (2010:15). I took issue with this description, as it seemed to articulate a position to the past that like its nationalist predecessors, idealized the past by ascribing a morality to the old way that stands in contrast to a demonized imperial power.

However, many students echoed this sentiment but disagreed with my interpretation that the garden and desires for greening the movement simply reinstituted nationalist longing for a pre-industrial past. As one student insisted, “This isn’t about being a strong nation-state, it’s about changing the way we do things.” That is to say, the garden itself was meant to evoke the agricultural past in order to advocate a model



of self-sufficiency as the solution to the current economic and political impasse. “It’s not merely a political problem, it’s a problem of becoming less dependent on systems that provide for you,” one student explained. While students acknowledged that the existent system of exchange was itself a vestige of the colonial ties to the U.S., they argued that economic conditions were not resolvable merely by cutting political ties from the US. In order to disentangle the futures of the US and the island, it was necessary to first develop the potentiality of the island itself.

Returning to Jameil’s quote again is instructive because it highlights the possibility for developing the island’s potential lies in an oscillation between past and future. In his quote, one can see that newness is temporally located in the past as he describes it, so far from today’s cultural hegemony and yet, is based on a memory that he could not have. How then, are we to understand Jameil’s feeling of being connected with practices and people that preceded his past?

A few examples from *campa* may help to clarify how the garden served a way of sustaining a counter-narrative about processes of displacement and urbanization, linking their acts to the past. At the campsite on the beach, many of my interlocutors would semi-jokingly refer to themselves as present-day *cimarrones* (maroons) and, at other times, *jíbaros*. One day, while sitting in the encampment with a few of the residents, I asked how they could be both or either, given that they lived in an urban landscape. As Ezekiel explained to me, self-identifying with these icons of the past was more of a figurative re-appropriation than anything else. “There’s a lot we have been taught to believe about the *jíbaro*—that he was white and more Spaniard than anything else. But we know they were mixed like me and were the most rebellious and intelligent

people. We've just been asked to believe that they were docile because then we'll accept our colonization." "Yea!" another chimed in, "they gave us shoes and they called that progress but we didn't realize that in exchange for those shoes, we would lose our place and our knowledge." One farmer Juanma explained, "The *jíbaro* itself may not be the thing we are recuperating, but we are interested in his practices, in becoming neojibaros." Thus, activists not only sought to recuperate the *jíbaro* but have also reshaped him in important ways. In their view, the *jíbaro* was no longer associated with a narrative of backwardness and simplicity popularized in iconic representations. Because the interior of the island was notoriously difficult to reach, the *jíbaro* was imagined by activists and farmers to have existed outside the system and was thus tied to an image of rebellion against the system. Thus, *jíbaro* practices are imagined to promote an idea of self-sufficiency that activists wanted to recuperate from the past.

Although the "official" record concerns the past, history can only be written by "silencing the past" as Trouillot puts it (1995). In the case of counter-memorializing accounts of activists and advocates, however, attention to memory constitutes a reversal of the traditional role of the record—finding ways to make the exclusions and ruptures of the record "speak." It is essential to pay attention to the role of the imagination, the embracing of fictions, as well as to the impossibility of separating out these two different processes. *The garden ruptured other fictions as well. Like those who would complain to me about the lack of dedication that other members of the collective showed for her care. These moments turned into sour judgments about who was really productive and quienes se fueron de picnic. (who was on holiday). Finding a way to*

*accept different levels of participation, and working together, remained a challenge for activists in both locales, never fully resolved in the period of occupation.*

The difference between this idea of recovering the *jíbaro* practices and purist nationalist accounts of the *jíbaro* is that in the latter, *el jíbaro* is that “authentic” Puerto Rican that needed to be saved. Instead of wanting to rescue a victimized *jíbaro*, activists imagined him as rebellious and resistant. Following historians documentation of the mixed race population that existed in the isolated mountain communities—a combination of extremely impoverished Spanish farmers and deserters, runaway slaves and Taíno (indigenous) survivors—activists understood the *jíbaro* to stand in for a model of a self-sufficient community that existed across difference. What is important to note here is the active reimagining of the past implicated by each interviewee.

Thus, Jameil was not alone in describing the work of the garden as a way to remember and reconfigure an idealized past, as represented through the figure of the *jíbaro*. The work of remembering the past was thus partly made through creating a distinct self-identity through re-visioning the past. In identifying oneself with practices which were once denigrated, I argue that the garden served as decolonial praxis—helping participants to re-establish a connection to histories which had been marginalized because they disrupted hegemonic narratives of the past. By recuperating that an integrated version of the self, activists who worked the garden were able to imagine a distinct future. Activists’ re-appropriation of the *jíbaro* shows that while memories of the past may have been socially suppressed (Cole 2001) or “arrested” (McGranaham 2005), they were still present as rememory. Whereas the practice of

remembering often involves the urgent re-telling of these narratives, which people rely upon for survival, rememory offers a different possibility for recuperating the past.

For example, Juan Flores, writing of efforts to recuperate the past through remembering highlights the impossibility of certain ideas being real. “Remembering thus always involves selecting and shaping, constituting out of what was something that never was but now assuredly is, in the imaginary of the present, and in the memory of the future” (Flores 1999: 274). Flores points to the nonlinearity of remembering; it is based on some notion of the past that can only exist in the present, but refers to what is desired in the future. The most provocative element of Flores’ representation of remembering is that memory creates something that never was but now is. It does not matter whether something exists in fact or not. It only matters whether or not it is imagined that it existed. Rememory is a different tool. One that restores the image of what once was, and in so doing, gives the present actors a possibility for remaking their future selves.

In addition to the way that the garden occasioned activists to re-member their own identity through the past, the garden produced other meanings through its very materiality more akin to Morrison’s concept of rememory. Although onlookers were unlikely to imagine themselves as *jíbaros* as activists did, my interlocutors believed that the garden would stimulate onlookers’ imagination of what kind of future was possible. “We’re looking to recreate a Caribbean aesthetic,” Ana Elisa explained, meaning that the garden was meant to force people to recognize the forgotten fertility of the island. The materiality of the garden enabled activists to show that beneath the concrete was a

land still as alive as it once was. Thus, remembering the past was not only accessible for those who worked the garden, but also for those who witnessed it.

By making food grow in unlikely places activists avoided falling into the nationalist tendency to fantasize returning to the past as a solution to the problems island residents faced. As one farmer explained it, “the garden is a reminder that at one time, food grew everywhere on this island.” This reminder was meant to activate new imaginaries of what was possible in the present moment, not necessarily to advocate that everyone “give up” their current lives and become like their ancestors. However, it was true that the garden made it possible to re-member the rural countryside in the city. In so doing, activists made space for radical praxis and imaginaries that often remained marginal to movements against privatization which are usually understood as purely a problem of capital or economy.

Overall, the garden called attention to the way that the future was imagined as a return to the past, at the same time that it goes beyond that past. Thinking with Morrison’s concept of rememory has clarified that the aesthetic can be a tool for accessing as well as commenting on histories and memories not necessarily proper to one’s individual memory or life. In the case of the gardening projects, we can also see the line between two dichotomies that order our thinking about history: individual and collective; past and present disrupted. In its physicality, the garden operated as a visual link between the past and present. Thus, the products of the garden went far beyond the literal fruits it produced. Instead, it reminded the public of the capacity of the island, and by extension, of its own potential for growth.

### ***Conclusion: The Cradle of Quantum Sovereignty***

One of the main differences between the look of the two gardens was that *huelguistas'* garden was complemented by other visual markers. Hand painted wooden signs marked each plant with scientific and popular names were mixed in with more protest signs and slogans. I became taken by one sign in particular, which identified the garden itself as *la cuna de la soberanía quantika* (cradle of quantum sovereignty). It was so significant to me because before leaving for the field, sovereignty was en vogue in academia, but few people mentioned the term while I was in the field. So when I came upon the sign I was thrilled to have the opportunity to discuss the term and her theory of quantum sovereignty with the author.

The subject of this section is based on a dialogic interview I conducted with Zchichi, a recently graduated painter from the university and author of the concept of quantum sovereignty. In what follows, I grapple with her efforts to tie sovereignty to quantum physics' conceptualization of time. Quantum mechanics non-linear notions of time and idea of the unknowability of matter serve as fodder for investigating why ephemeral spaces provide a means to revisit and re-member pasts in the present. I am aware that such claims are quite distinct from the usual way that quantum physics is mobilized outside its field in academia—which tend to emphasize our fundamental entanglement and as such, suggest a much less positive outcome than I do here. However, my claim in using the discussions I had with Zchizchi as a way of concluding this chapter on interconnected futures is to suggest the possibilities occasioned by our turn to seeing the ecological in the political and economic spheres of society which are, by my estimation fundamentally positive. By bridging these two fields of sovereignty

and temporality, I believe that Zchizchi makes evident Stenger's claim that "hope is the difference between probability and possibility" (2003: 256).

Zchichi was 24 when I met her, short hair and curvy and quite tall—truly a powerful presence. Other members of the gardening collective called her their "spiritual leader." In our casual conversations, she readily acceded to the identity and explained to me that she was working to develop her own syncretic spiritual practice. She made it clear that her activist work was not just about imagining political alternatives but also deeply intertwined with her mission to discover spiritual meaning in her own life and in the world as it had been constructed. She believed that beneath the politicized nature of the garden, it was necessary to develop a spiritual understanding of the importance of its existence within student's struggle for university autonomy. Zchichi's explained that the sign referenced the intersection between the spiritual and the political:

Quantum physics has always been important to be, both spiritually and politically. Quantum thinking opens up a world of possibilities. It just returns one to a status of 'wholeness.' You know what I mean? In response to why I would write cradle of quantum sovereignty, it's because I wanted to point to the fact that it is necessary not only to conceive of a different political status but also a sovereignty of the self, spiritually so we are able to make decisions, take control. We are not just experimenting with plants in the garden. We are creating a future by planting the seeds.

In ZchiZchi's explanation, I noticed the role and importance of the intention: planting the seed set in motion a journey towards an alternative future. Her words resonate with Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity which posits that matter and energy are fundamentally interrelated. In this way, one's potential for an unexpected outcome had more to do with the intention, or energy of cultivation more than the outcome itself, which according to quantum physics is inherently unknowable. For Zchichi, to take the

first step to learning how to garden meant to initiate a search for self-determination. Indeed, to me, it seemed that thinking of the garden as the cradle of quantum sovereignty seemed another way to describe the act of sensing new possibilities through action, generating new material by placing one's energy on it. As Gary Zukav wrote in *Dancing Wu Li Masters* a book on physics written for non-specialists, "Quantum mechanics is based upon the idea of minimal knowledge of future phenomena...[which] leads to the possibility that our reality is what we choose to make it" (1979: 3). The potential that was made into matter through the garden was the possibility of making the land anew in forging a new relationship to place that signaled to Zchichi the possibility of being a whole self. In that sense, her concept of quantum sovereignty rested on the realization that growing things in the garden trained one to imagine an alternative way of returning the fragments of the past (back) together but in an order that didn't exist before.

To make this leap between the past that was and wasn't, Zchzchi used quantum physics to develop a distinct understanding of human consciousness. Since I have such limited experience with the science of quantum physics, she pointed me to two popular films, *The Quantum Activist* (2009) and *What the #\$\*! do we know* (2004). They offer new age interpretations of the radical relativity of time and the unstable nature of particles. The films feature two scientists in particular although there are also others: Amit Goswami and Stephen Hawking.

Goswami a Ph.D. trained theoretician of quantum physics mostly advances his notion of quantum cosmology in the film *the Quantum Activist* who has mainly left academia to work in the popular sphere. Stephen Hawking is of course, a very well-



known physicist who investigates black holes and is interested in fields that have no space-time boundary. Both videos cause us to question the logic behind linear time and predictability of matter. Goswami for example, posits that particles are themselves less stable and that if we tap into “universal consciousness then we will discover that it and not matter is the basis of all existence. From a totally distinct perspective, Stephen Hawking arrives at a similar point when he argued that there could be no initial state of the universe. In his *A Brief History of Time*, Hawking wonders, why we can’t remember forwards, as well as backwards (1988). Isabel Stenger echoes such a sentiment in her two volume *Cosmopolitics* (2010) which explores these old controversies about time in philosophical terms. Experiments of quantum physics discard or find inadequate notions of linear time and suggest that time is not chronologically arranged but rather, that it is only that humans have chosen to measure it as such.

Returning to Zchizchi’s concept of quantum sovereignty, it is apparent that if we cannot actually predict the movement of subatomic particles movement through space/time with precision, then we can begin to think of them as a “choice.” I don’t think she meant it in a strict sense but rather to initiate a fundamental shift in how one views determined outcomes and futures. Identifying “the garden” as the cradle of sovereignty seems to suggest that moving forward in the linear sense of time rests in an activist’s ability to accept and grow within the cyclical time of nature. The cradle, as the place where life is nurtured in the early stages of its existence, seems to ascribe a start time to quantum sovereignty, and places the garden participants in role of caretaker. However, if our future is tied to the natural cycle, it points to the ironies or problems of a sovereignty that tries to push along a linear path then it gets stuck in the cycle. Thus,

if one becomes cognizant of the wheel like nature beneath the unconscious thinking linearity can imbue in us, then it is possible to get out of it—to cultivate a *quantum sovereignty of the self*.

Attention to the cyclical nature of gardening as a practice of struggle, remaps sovereignty, locating it on the level of body. Thus garden and the larger practice of planting as a tool of resistance encouraged activists to learn (re-member) “traditional” practices of agricultural work. That knowledge helped to make possible that sense of connectedness to place even if it is limited in scope of incorporation. Although the gardens had a powerful impact in the way they shifted the image of the strike and squat, many members of the gardening collectives expressed frustration at the way their project remained peripheral to the central project of the movements. Thus, in each movement, there were challenges to creating consistent care for the gardens. In the university, all members agreed that there wasn’t really a connection between the student movement and the gardening project, an idea that I also heard expressed by participants in the garden project at the campsite. As such, its aesthetic dimensions were more potent than its literal ones.

## THE LIMITS OF EPHEMERAL SPACE: *LA CONVIVENCIA EN LA LUCHA*

This chapter explores how *la convivencia* (coexistence) shapes possibilities for and predicts certain breaks from making social change. *La convivencia* is a complex challenge in social justice work and even more so in spaces of resistance where activists must get along with those with whom they cohabite. Feminists of color have long argued that the external goals of a movement are bound up with the inner life of a movement and of one's individual actions (Combahee River Collective 1986; Lorde 1984, Anzaldúa 1987, hooks 1981, Minh-Ha 1989). Following their interventions, in this chapter I argue that *la convivencia* deepens our understanding of how to engage in prefigurative political action in significant ways. In particular, *la convivencia* offers us tools link mundane problems that emerge when one lives with other activists to larger challenges to enacting social justice in the present moment. I am interested in what *la convivencia* may tell us about the challenges, or the underside of autonomies imagined and made in ephemeral spaces of resistance.

In the past, we have not seen work on *la convivencia* as a movement is ongoing because of the threat of being called a traitor to the movement.<sup>1</sup> Another concern is that

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that anthropologists' writings often highlight the internal tensions and debates in social movement organizing but I differentiate between this work and the work of narrating *la convivencia* in the latter's attention to daily practices that refer to the challenges of cohabitation in particular. As a result of activists' foregrounding prefiguration as political praxis in the global uprisings of 2011, anthropologists have increasingly turned to the matter of coexisting in protest space with fellow activists as a tool for indexing the "success" of an action. See for example, McCleave Maharawal's piece in the special Hot Spot online edition of *Cultural Anthropology* edited by Jeffrey Juris and Maple Rasza (2011). <http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/641>

speaking out would lead to one being excluded from organizing in the future. In presenting these challenges, I am realize that I will disrupt the “romance of community” (Johnson 2002), and put my own acceptance into the spaces where I worked at considerable risk. My task in describing some of the more unsightly dimensions of activist work is not to denounce them. Rather, in breaking with the trend of silencing inner conflicts I aim to highlight persistent challenges to radical political action. By offering such reflections while the movement is still alive, I hope that they can be addressed and moved beyond instead of written about after the fact, once a project and its actors are either dead or long gone from *la lucha*. In addition, I consider this chapter to contribute to anthropological writings on the tensions inherent in the relationships we develop in the field.

Questions of *la convivencia* became important in my primary site of research, *el Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo* early on, as a result of my failed efforts to ascertain reasons why there were so few residents in the site as well as the peculiar absence of women residents. While I recognize that it is difficult to sustain numbers of residents in direct action occupations because of the stress it places on one's daily schedule: the more stable one's life is<sup>2</sup> the more difficult it can be to reside in such spaces over a long period of time. However, women's absence was a strange and glaring problem, made even more striking by squatter-activists' efforts to deny it. Although on most days, residents gathered in small groups with visitors and allies and casually debated political and philosophical questions of the island's future, the matter of where the women had

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<sup>2</sup> Stability can be difficult to measure but for my purposes, I use it to index employment and familial responsibilities which can often prevent actors from living in ephemeral spaces of resistance for long periods of time.

gone was never directly addressed. I came to expect one of three responses: 1. a nonchalant shrug or no response; 2. outright denial of the issue; many would reply to my inquiry by reaffirming the fact that “women have lived here!” or 3. met with sexist comments like, “women can’t withstand the elements,” that is the physical conditions of occupation. Still, I became convinced that women’s absence provided insight into low levels of participation, as I noticed how problems between the men who lived together limited their own day-to-day interactions and possibilities of working together.

Neither resident-squatters nor the allies who came to visit willingly acknowledged issues related to *la convivencia* in my presence, but the problems related to getting along manifested repeatedly. Most often, they would suddenly appear in surprising fights or conflicts or when rumors about things that happened in the past were discussed. At various moments during the course of my stay, I too found myself in very uncomfortable one-on-one encounters with residents, moments where my presence as an unaccompanied female made me the target of various sexual and otherwise intimate propositions.<sup>3</sup> There was little recourse to contest or even process these moments with other activists for two main reasons. First, the campsite’s structure was that of “no structure,” that is to say, activist-residents had very few rules, more implicit than explicit and many residents floated in and out of the space at will. Second, the handful of activists that were residents of the encampment judged problems related to *la convivencia* as peripheral to their struggles to defend open access to the five acres of

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<sup>3</sup> Although I hasten to note that at no time was I the victim of sexual assault, there are many reports of women ethnographers becoming themselves targets of sexual abuse and harassment in the field. See for example, <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/context-and-variation/2013/04/13/safe13-field-site-chilly-climate-and-abuse/> The fact that these questions are often marginalized from the final product of our study, suggests that we have much further to go in terms of the politics of representation, the analysis of field relations and the reflexive turn than we have since the publication of *Writing Culture* (1986) and *Women Writing Culture* (1996).

beachfront property they have occupied since 2005 and did their very best to ignore any disagreements until they couldn't be ignored anymore, at which time the resident would be asked to leave.

Problems related to *la convivencia* in the UPR student struggle were not immediately apparent to me but manifested themselves in later stages of students' occupation becoming exacerbated in the moments after the first strike was lifted. The issues that I became most interested in demonstrated that as student-strikers faced more extreme repressive tactics on the part of the state, they also became more much stringent and exclusionary in determining the boundaries of appropriate protest. I am particularly interested in highlighting how participatory democracy and anarchist postures were differentiated in these later moments. Why were militant tactics and modes of pleasure-seeking once part and parcel of the environment of strike life, later incompatible with the "spirit" of the movement? In the university struggle, I argue that such battles over the "appropriate boundaries" of protest manifested at the level of *la convivencia* and severely limited the creativity of the student tactics of resistance.

Efforts to resolve issues related to *la convivencia* looked quite different in the UPR than in *campa* for a few reasons worth reiterating there. First, the creative strike was a part of one of the many local movements against corruption and repression emergent in 2010, and *huelguistas* understood that living together was a fundamental dimension of the struggle to defend the university. Indeed, it was among the most important aspects of their efforts to engage in prefigurative political action. The demographics of the university occupation by students were also distinct from *campa*: levels of female participation were very high. Women were leaders in all issues relating

to the strike; many of them took care of a great majority of the logistical matters necessary to run *los comites de base* (literally, base committees; refers to the autonomous encampments within the campus) even though in the first strike those who were interviewed by media and volunteered for assuming the public role of spokesperson tended to be male. In individual interviews I noted that many female *huelguistas* explained their disinterest in communicating directly with the media because they were “unprepared.” However, during our discussions, many agreed that the grave disparity suggested that some deeper internalization of gender roles was at play.<sup>4</sup>

After the first strike was lifted, members of the movement held dialogue sessions or *conversatorios* some formalized as in the Humanities committee or others were informal discussions I shared among groups of *huelguistas* who reflected on what had transpired and speculated about what it would take to change in the future. When the second strike was initiated, *huelguistas* were keen to disrupt the disparity of women and men in the media. One concrete change was that three women were elected to the negotiating committee and students were much more consciousness about trying to make the outer representation reflect what was already going on within the movement where women participated in all facets of the strike.

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<sup>4</sup> Some *huelguistas* that I interviewed disagreed with my claim that women felt unprepared because of their socialization to be less vocal and subordinate to men. Those that disagreed cited the fact that even some men did not like to talk in front of the cameras because they felt unprepared. In this sense, preparedness was defined in terms of the kind of education students were undertaking or the experiences they might have (or not) with media. As one student, Miriam Ruíz pointed out, “the media only cares about sound bites, and is not the ideal place to express one’s ideas to the public.” To her mind, some would have rather just save their energy making proposals to be presented at plenary sessions and in speaking in forums where they could be understood, like in action (base) committee meetings, or in informal conversations with allies who interacted with students at the gates.

Another way that students were sensitive to the issues related to *la convivencia* was in terms of their organizational structure. The university strike was organized according to the principles of participatory democracy, a practical structure and political project that strove to create opportunities for all members of a population to make meaningful contributions to decision-making processes. Thus when conflicts arose, they were all solved through verbal mediations on distinct levels depending on the nature of the situation. Cases of internal violence were handled by the security committee; if the conflict was between members of the five autonomous communities, it would be dealt with *comite* where the *huelguistas* resided. If the case was particularly controversial and involved a broad spectrum of actors from different encampments it would be brought to the daily plenary sessions. I should stress that even in the latter instance, these issues stayed “in house;” they were not ever publicized in the media.

For my purposes here, I am interested in the issues that were addressed in the plenary sessions. Part of this interest is practical: given the size of the movement, it was quite difficult for me to be privy to internal issues that arose unless I knew the students involved personally or heard it at a plenary session. But the issues brought to the plenary are themselves important to consider because they point to fissures within the collective. These moments that polarized activists often dealt with what constituted the membership and what constituted appropriate behavior for the collective and highlighted the limits of collectivism, in much the same way that women’s absence did in the case of *campa*.

In what follows, I use a series of experimental vignettes to center questions of *la convivencia* in each movement—foregrounding disagreements and limits that emerged



in order show how difficult it is to break with past (socialized) ways of being in temporary resistance spaces. In their treatment of difference, moments of failed intersubjective understandings can make us feel that we are stuck in a loop, always circling back and never arriving at real change. In moments of tension and internal drama, we can see clearly that the struggle to keep *la lucha* alive provokes modes of engagement with others and with the self that are antithetical to revolutionary praxis.

Given the sensitivity of these matters of the internal life of the movement and even the way that I came to know of them, I believe that more than other chapters, a radically experimental mode of narrating and theorizing is necessary. Indeed, the bulk of the “data” I use to tell these stories are based on “rumors,” secrets that were partially revealed and then were submerged again. To learn of facts through rumors may seem a bit contradictory. But as Veena Das writes of rumors, they are not as unfamiliar to our way of understanding the world as scholarship might tell us. She writes, “The presence of rumor in the life of Manjit, lived as that unspoken past that remained virtual—surrounding her relationships yet never given direct expression in speech” (2007:100). How we live with others is a problem textured with ethical and political contradictions. These contradictions can be difficult to identify in chaotic moments verbally, but *la convivencia* resonates in our being at the level of affect. In this chapter more than others, it is my goal to demonstrate how the unspoken past continues to shape the present moment as a tissue of echoes, repetitions, and foregone conclusions.

### ***Las playas son del pueblo***

#### ***Eroding Publics Or, Displacement Stops Here***

Isla Verde's notion of the public is merely symbolic, a liability. If you haven't yet been introduced to *campa*, you would believe that the only way to get to the beach is by choosing between a handful of public entry ways, walking down walled in concrete paths that eventually lead to the shore. That is, of course, unless one is a resident of the many gated communities or guest at one of the hotels which obstruct one's view of the coastline.

*Campa*<sup>i</sup> sits at the very end of *la Avenida Isla Verde* and offers a space to contemplate the erosion of the public sphere. From here, the effects of privatization are palpable: unshielded and unobstructed. I can see one old building—probably built in the sixties when Isla Verde was an up and coming tourist mecca—now surrounded by sea. The waves crash into the abandoned building whose open air deck and tattered sign stand like the front of an old ship—once majestic symbol of a bootstrap boom era long gone—founded on an arrogant fallacy that human “civilization” was superior to natural forces. These buildings are no match for the ebb and flow of the sea as she slowly engulfs spaces that are everyday more completely subordinated to her power.

Being with these friends of the sea—a core cadre of men—was impressive. I watched as they cared for her and fought the relentless displacement of the public by just being there. No proprietary interest, no receipts needed. *cero papeleo*. Just free.

Visitors are offered an open invitation, *¡a gozar!* And are ushered through a water resistant canopy covering the communal homespace of the camp.

From here, it feels as if one has been transported elsewhere. There are tents of multiple sizes and varied colors, orchids line handmade paths surrounded by a lush greenness impossible to find in neighboring tourist spaces—where sands are manicured and palm trees uniformly line the coast.

***At first***

I found a beautiful reversal in seeing these men care for the sea.  
The feminized task of caring appropriated by these committed activists.

How sweet that they too cared for her.

On my first visit, I was invited to sit under a tree, next to a punching bag hanging from a tattered rope with knots in it for climbing. On the days the boys really want to demonstrate their bravado, they take turns hitting the semi-deflated punching bag and pulling themselves up the rope. I sit in a metal chair next to a hammock while being inspected from afar by two dogs and a few teenage boys. I'm brought some water and a banana from an older man, Don Fernando, who greets me briefly before returning to his cleaning: sweeping up the earth as one would the floor of a home. The movement creates a small cloud of dust: part dirt, part sand.

***At first***

I wondered what to make of all these seemingly idyllic interactions. But, I'd learn over time that much of what was at stake was hidden beneath the surface. A silence potent and immobilizing.

I'm surrounded by my brothers but beyond me and the sea, there was absolutely no feminine energy.

I felt silence's power to strangle me ***at first***

When, new researcher still itchy to be "doing" fieldwork, I'd eagerly accept invitations to talk in private: one-on-one. They came in different guises: a ride to Piñones for some food. An invitation to kayak in nearby mangroves. A ride home after the buses had stopped for the evening. Each time, our informal chat moved awkwardly between each person's secret intentions: from my questions about the camp and political futures for the island to his questions meant to size up my availability as a potential partner.

***At first***

these were offers that I politely turned down without recourse to my own sexual identity. Always scared to "pull the card" because I was alone after all, far from the protection of family or even close friends. ***At first***

I could feel the weight of so much silence and ran away from it. I shied away from the campsite.

Taking breaks from the tension became necessary *at first*.

When I returned, I was grateful to be back (home). This was one place on the island—my homeland in political imaginings more than in practice—I was accepted as much as anyone else. Here I didn't have to justify my identity and withstand the barrage of questions aimed at displacing me in a (not so) subtle way. Inside this campsite, my politics mattered more. My project mattered more and I felt like this could be home.

*Learning the Interconnected Futures: la lucha fissured*

Campa is a place of tangible interconnections.

So many squatter activists who wound up here first worked in Vieques in Amigos del M.A.R.'s<sup>5</sup> direct action encampments set up in the U.S. Navy's bombing zone during the most well-known moment of a generations' long struggle to get the navy off the island and to stop the bombing.

Motivated by a (partial) win, they carried their vision across the ocean  
“*si a la marina la sacamos, a los hoteleros también los sacamos.*”<sup>6</sup>

Such hopefulness is muted today, but an important key to understanding the interconnected futures of the struggle for these 5 acres of land.

When I first arrived, however, it was only words that signaled its relationship to other places. Like the tagged up trailer covered by activist in caricature holding signs that mark the varied crossings between the campsite and other coastal struggles. It announces to its visitors: *Las Playas son del pueblo!* (the beaches belong to the people!) The sign reminds you that tethered to the future of the campsite are many other

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<sup>5</sup>Friends of the Revolutionary Environmental Movement (Amigos del Movimiento Ambiental Revolucionario [M.A.R.]) is an organization co-founded by Alberto De Jesus (Tito Kayak) in 1995. Their basic mission is to promote the conservation of the environment and they do so through both educational workshops and informal talks as well as direct actions.

<sup>6</sup> If we got rid of the U.S. Navy, we'll get rid of the hotelies.

small struggles to rescue the public: *Piñones no se vende! No a Plutonium*. Placed alongside one another they reflect a truth nearly all but forgotten: *la tierra se nos va*.<sup>7</sup>

The reality of displacement resonated to the very core of my being as a visitor from the outside-in. Although I was not born on the island, as I grew knowledgeable of its history and the economic forces of migration that had pulled my family from it, I came to think of myself as an exile. Such a posture made me an easy ally.

Sometimes I wonder if the critiques, the cynics are right. *5 cuerdas*. it's only 5 acres. I could see that in some ways, the space was nothing at all like the radical displacement of Viequenses from 21,000 acres of land by the U.S. Navy. No one even lived here until the campsite was set up. But, how many acres of this island "belong" to the hotel (tourism) industry? I cannot count them. First, it was just the city without the sea but now even leaving San Juan the situation repeats itself. Gates in Loíza, Río Grande, Arecibo, Rincón, Isabela.

These interconnections remind me that size does matter.  
*Every little bit of it.*

Now and then, the reminders are more blatant. Like Project 1505, affectionately known as *Ley Tito Kayak*: new amendment to the penal code that seeks to "dis"inspire spectacular occupations of controversial construction projects like *campa* and its sister project *Paseo Caribe*,<sup>8</sup> this bill effectively amended the penal code, and blatantly

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<sup>7</sup>La tierra se nos va. (translation: the land is being taken from us). This quote is taken from Carmelo Rodríguez Torres' first novel, *Veinte siglos después del Homicidio* (37:1971) which portrays the spiritual, and ecological effects of the United States presence on the island of Vieques. The problem he describes are based in part on the dislocation and displacement of Viequenses from the land.

<sup>8</sup> The Paseo Caribe residential and commercial complex at the entrance of the San Juan islet, built extremely close to the sea, was also a site of extreme controversy. Although a campsite was set up there, it lasted for only one year and two of the three buildings were completed during the protest period, causing tense encounters between workers and activists. When it was still a bill, *Tito Kayak's Law*, (now

criminalized protest. Conscientious people be warned: it's now a felony to put the body where the words are. They have illegalized the practice of *rescate* (rescue).

Word has it the government doesn't want anything to impede construction of la via verde, "natural gas" tube whose proposed route will cut through the center of the karst region, home to the island's largest reserve of water.

Environmental time-is-money-bomb: tick tick.

*Oh well, such is life.*

It's understandable that not many people think much about campa. *Its just 5 acres.*

Don't know that the police have begun to limit access to the camp, setting the precedent during Easter week that they can and will shut down vehicular entry *pa joder*...you know, just for the fun of it. Those that do realize they can't enter, note it only for the inconvenience it implies: it is difficult to find free parking in the Isla Verde area. Once the campsite's parking lot was reopened, the public came back but seemed oblivious to the larger implications of the temporary blockade. The fact that these visitors know little to nothing about the struggle itself seems to matter little to the activists. *The important thing is that they come.*

But, such idealistic postures are overshadowed on Saturday nights, when the activists struggle with visitors who return at night and can't understand why suddenly the parking they so relish during the day isn't available. On one night I walk out with him, and listen as he whispers exasperated, "I'm sorry you can't park here to go to the

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amendment 208(a) of the Penal Code), referenced the campsite at Paseo Caribe as one of the major problems of free expression posed for the development of the island. The controversy in Paseo Caribe was not limited to the question of public coastal land, but also included concerns that the historic Fort Geronimo would be completely blocked off to the public as a result of the construction. (see Fernós: 2008).

casino...uh huh...well, you see, it'd be kind of a contradiction. We have a lawsuit against them.”

I turn away from the uncomfortable encounter and look to the roadway outside: Marriott Casino's overflow custy gambler parks anywhere, *algarete*, and still, they don't get ticketed by the many officers who patrol the area. Maybe they'd rather such loyal consumers spend their money inside. Informally legalized to park everywhere, they don't understand.remember.care.

*The Garden: Seeds of Peace or Dominance?*

Just after HR Properties cut the trees and laid the concrete, artist-activists, started planting. Today visitors are awestruck as they marvel at this little forest on the edge of an urbanized coastline. By using the space to remind their visitors of intertwined human and ecological futures, activists sought to suture broken connections and make a more obvious link between this project and a feeling of being at home. Literal reafforestation became a way to make the symbolic link tangible. This parcel of land stands in for the potential for human survival: an ecological analogue. One of the workers from the underground explained it simply, “the tree is you.” Only a little care and you explode with possibility.

Such a feeling catches in me as I find myself drifting off, thinking  
*If it a symbol for me, I've got so much life left.*

Temporarily, the presence of the garden sliced open narrow (individualist) vision and bodily boundaries became more subtle. Filled with a profound sense of inter-being, they speak of the fate of other trees. *En el corredor*, Arecibo, Ponce and Adjuntas.<sup>9</sup>

These symbols of interdependence manifest multiple. So, they thought: why stop with trees? Thus sprang to life the garden projects and a desire to nourish the struggle became paramount. Even though such utopian values of interdependence were promoted through the garden, I found it strange that the caretakers of it remained marginal to the struggle. Others, eager to claim it as a project of the collective would wield its presence around but it was still patriarchal masculinity that presided over its growth. I couldn't shake the feeling that it was this play for dominance that made the other crazed and reckless boys contest its relevance. Some residents stood by aloof—they refused to work on the gardens finding it an imposition to their radical autonomy. When I asked why they didn't participate, they'd reply gruff, "I'm here and that's enough." When a fight broke out between those who cared for the gardens and the others, over some shady snitching behavior, the garden became evidence of their unreliability. See! We knew this would happen. *They just wanted to work on some bullshit which is secondary to the action of resisting the Marriott.*

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<sup>9</sup> These places will be familiar to some readers who are knowledgeable about the current attacks on undeveloped spaces in Puerto Rico. I name them directly because they were talked about regularly by activists in the campsite. *En el corredor*, refers specifically to the Corredor Ecológico del Noreste, The NorthEast Ecological Corridor, a reserve in the footstools of El Yunque, the National Rainforest, whose designation was recently revoked by the current governor, Luis Fortuño in order to build two major hotels in the region. Arecibo refers to a campsite founded to contest the privatization of "el pozo del Obispo" a very popular local beach. Ponce refers to another campsite founded to prevent the cutting of 100+ trees for a construction project. Various members of the Isla Verde campsite helped organize there. Adjuntas is probably the most well-known case internationally; it is the home of Casa Pueblo, a non-profit community organization leading the fight against *el gasoducto*. A natural-gas pipeline slated to cross some of the territory's most fragile ecosystems, the largest reserve of water and archaeological sites. Casa Pueblo itself was founded during one of the most successful environmentalist struggles on the island and prevented gold mining in the inner mountain range in the 1980s.



I find the plant caught in this internal battle. It seemed that the land was poisoned by the unsavory ruptures created in secret imposed silence. These unsightly matters kill new possibilities for growth just as ravishing as a plague or a drought. Struggles for the dominance of one style of *lucha* over another cause plants to flourish and die. A cycle that moves in time with erupting disagreements instead of the harvest moon and seasons. They are caught in a cycle of care and neglect, marking the impossibility of forward movement in the struggle for justice when *la convivencia* is not understood to be an inherent part of the struggle.

The garden was just the very tip of all the *convivencia* struggles that lay dormant underneath the surface. One by one, they seemed minor. *How could you be friends with him, Meli? He is so violent!* But I am stubborn, and ignored the warnings.

Today I think, was this an outsider status alert?  
Everything beautiful and nothing ugly allowed for the visitor please.

Since he dedicated his time to such peaceful work, I couldn't understand why there was so much opposition to him or why the garden project was so abhorrent to others. But, I learned that breaks in the boundaries between the self and the world could also be heavy as an indelible mark of failed *convivencia*, of shared responsibility for the cultivation of the space. Taken together, these abandoned projects and irreconcilable differences between members—both those still present and others who had long since left—hung heavy like a weight.

The potency of rumors of whispered utterances that the space had failed to become what it promised created an ever present draining tension. As I called it in dead time, a feeling of stuckness, of not wanting to leave. First magical, then sickening. Most residents float away for a time away from the rhythm of occupation without end.

But beyond that, to ignore the silences takes away one's energy and vision. Like trying to ask a million different ways where the women had gone. Deja vú, such secrets give you deja vú as they are disavowed any connection to the movement. Instead, just a little personal problem, here, there...nothing to do with *lucha*. "What at one time one refuses to see never vanishes but returns, again and again, in many forms."<sup>10</sup> Such connections are like the power of the sea, slowly eroding away distances as she crashes into Gaia, obliterating the boundaries to which we cling.

*Gaia's Revenge: Hostile Memories and Wounded Egos*

Another Gaia lived in camp whose memory brought out an undercurrent of antagonism so deep. A pendulum-like under toe that swings between violence and protection. They serve(d) as complementary oppositions, revealing disparate aspects of the chaos of passion. What aspect of the dyad I could perceive depended on where I was standing. Standing closer to violence, I feel the danger of being pulled in, forced to choose sides. Then closer to protection, I could stand as close as I wanted to the maelstrom, totally unafraid as a spectator behind the glass.

Spaces of resistance are fueled by passion but sometimes, it becomes poisonous, and violence sneaks into one's way of being, one's practice of being-with. Passion unsettles. What can start out as anger, can easily morph into disgust, becoming sadness, spiking up suddenly as an occasion for ego-tripping. As time passes and the actual present becomes past, these passions were harder to identify: buried beneath so many contradictory emotions and wounds.

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<sup>10</sup> This quote is a beautiful way of explaining the habit of denial. It appears in *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (Griffin 1992: 17) I find it useful to describe the way in which secrets kept through denial make one physically sick.

I heard early on of a case of domestic violence brought against the star of the camp, but whenever I tried to bring it up, folks defended him so virulently that I found no opening to interrogate another possibility. Suddenly the rumor was brought to the surface by the star himself. It was a quiet day, just the three of us in the kitchen when suddenly the star began to reminisce about the history so long denied. Looking at me he says, “*You didn’t know her, She was crazy!*” I hold back the urge to grab my notebook. But no longer in a good way.

No longer a badge of honor [LOCO]  
no longer on the inside of crazy. [] x  
her badge of honor was replaced with **injurious epithets:**  
He called her a **LIAR!** twice: *una mentirosa, esa embustera!*

They speculate she was an infiltrated member, a liar and a spy: *una chota*. The star remarks, “Sometimes, I think the feds send us the crazies. She really had us fooled *la pendeja esa.*”

*I am always uncomfortable in these moments and can never tell if its my own paranoia or if I’m actually perceiving that the distrust they hold for this woman has become an insinuation related to my own trustworthiness. Inevitably, I am reminded of the half-serious joke(s) thrown at me in other moments. What do you do anyway? How do we know you aren’t a spy?? After the laughter the air is filled with the suggestion that my alliances remain always in question.*

I find myself laughing along in time with the crew. Even I have to admit that her stories sound incredulous. But, slowly, almost imperceptibly, things become murkier. The other man, *the one in charge of the space (but don’t tell the star that!)* leads the questioning. Rumors are rehashed —*Was she the star’s jeva*<sup>11</sup>? —but never addressed. Instead, the star smiles and shrugs. No clear answers are given. *Did they fuck?* The

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<sup>11</sup> Jeva signals someone you are dating unofficially. It is most akin to the English term, “friends with benefits,” although the nature of that friendship may be even more unrecognized in the English equivalent.

possibility seems more like a probability: affirmed only in his body. In his laughter.

*Did she get pregnant?* Suddenly, things become much more serious and the star looks angry. The mere suggestion of pregnancy provokes his indignant rejection, a refusal that spurred him to another kind of play.

Jumping out of his seat, the star sets out to clear his name. Although he is a man given to the performative, this is the first time I see it manifest so directly. He begins by locating us in a time when the pregnancy rumor was a present-day drama. “I walk past her, she’s slumped over in a seat in the kitchen, sleeping. “ He compels my assistance in the reenactment, and says, “*Mirame mal.*” (Look at me with disgust.)

Easy, I think and comply.

Such stories bring out a feeling of discomfort in me and mute any sense of respect that I have for him.

Looking at me, he’s himself. His former self is decidedly calm, which given the magnitude of the situation he was facing, comes off as him playing stupid. He begins with a simple, if rhetorical query: “*que pasó?*” (what happened?) Then, he’s another female comrade who remains unnamed. “How could you just be walking around here like that when she’s there having an abortion and it’s your fault!” Again, as himself: “oh please that chick isn’t pregnant; it’s just another one of her stories.” He makes a gesture—shoo shoo—and walks off.

*Scene change: The final confrontation.*

Now she’s awake. He is her (again). He imitates a monkey as he sways holding an invisible rock in hand (so that we know she is animalistic), on the brink of a breakdown. She’s screaming, out of control and we the viewers know that she will soon let it fly. Then he’s himself: he enacts a sophisticated and alert bob and weave

sequence and we all know he is waiting for the right moment to preempt her attack. The dance is prologue and foreshadows a justification for getting a little violent with her.

*La tenía que controlar! (I had to control her!)*

Suddenly, the soon-to-be-exiled arrives to the camp, and crashes into the star's unchallenged recollections. Sarcastically he says, "Are still talking about Gaia? I can't believe you. You think you are Filiberto<sup>12</sup> or something?" The story, neither corroborated nor challenged, is simply circumvented. *La ex-compa*, falls into oblivion. The battleground becomes present tense. Male.

She becomes invisible in the alpha male battle which ensues.

*I realize that I too have suddenly disappeared from the landscape. I feel the attention shifting away from me as the aggressions rise: first the voices then their bodies become implicated as they walk close to each other, into personal space. The possibility of contact seems imminent.*

For such a utopian piece of free territory their way of living with one another is so familiar. A unending battle for supremacy which kills any potential for cooperative modes of interacting.

The fight spirals out of control and descends into a childish ridicule. In a mimicry of the soon-to-be-exiled, the star pushes hard on a recent disagreement, still ripe with resentment. The leader of the underground defends the integral, if ignored support he has given to the star in moments that are publicized as solo acts. His tone is threatening. "Don't forget where you came from, who always had your back. *Lo de*

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<sup>12</sup> Filiberto Ojeda Rios was the commander in chief of the Boricua Popular Army, Los Macheteros, a clandestine paramilitary organization that considers United States rule over Puerto Rico to be oppressive colonization and advocates its independence through violent means. He is one of the paramount leaders of the sovereignty movement, and lived in hiding for over 20 years until he was discovered and murdered by the FBI, 2005, when he was 72.

*Paseo Caribe.*”<sup>13</sup> He touches the center of the issue—the star refuses to recognize how his successes were made possible by all the support he has been given by others, refuses to recognize how this battle cannot be won alone—but his fury takes over. No one can hear real issues beneath such nonsensical chatter. Their confrontation threatens to provoke bloodshed. Quickly, they become like two roosters fighting for survival.

*or is it for supremacy?*

Unraveling histories, stagnated by our internalized modes of (dis)engagement, are still at the heart of the challenges to create new visions of liberation.

*Becoming the Little Sister of the Crew: Alternative Routes In*

I heard they were trouble. The one in charge (but don’t tell the star that) did not want me to hang with these floaters and offered me warnings cloaked in mysticism and poetic metaphor. Like after the first time I went out with the soon-to-be-exiled the one in charge (but don’t tell the star that) pulled me to the side and told me, “in this concrete jungle, we have to learn to distinguish the wolf from the sheep.” He rarely explained anything further, leaving me with a sense that things were not as they seemed, but without tools to distinguish them.

*I admit* that hanging with the underground was not easy but they made me feel at ease by comparison: *acho meli! I’ve been to NY, played music out there for a couple months.* They understood that stateside Ricans have a passionate sense of identity and

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<sup>13</sup>As I described earlier, *Paseo Caribe* was a site of one of the campsites founded by Amigos del MAR. One of the most remembered moments was when the star of the campsite occupied one of the construction cranes for one week. In order to escape, he rappelled down from the crane directly into a kayak. Although popular representations describe his escape as a solo act, there were several other men from the underground present who used their kayaks to create a diversion so that he could escape from the police officers.

desire to preserve our culture and heritage and I didn't have to justify my presence as much as with others. Perhaps even more importantly, I made them feel at ease. At first, I was an ideal type: silent and pretty. Beneath the veneer—a combination of shyness and insecurity was a girl that feared speech. Tired of the constant questioning of identity accidents compelled.

*Evidence of lack: a truly diasporic phenomenon.*

They let me hang around, pleased by my intensely active listening. They tell me on more than one occasion, "If people spoke less and listened more like you, our situation wouldn't be the same." But my transience afforded me a kindness others who stayed weren't given. As a floater of sorts, I was given access to secrets because they knew I would be gone soon enough anyway. Such a temporary position lightened any expectations I might normally have to carry. The expectations that can strangle any possibility for a positive encounter with difference.

Still, it wasn't my silence, but my sexuality that led me inside(out). Safe. I got out of the trap of *la tiraera* with a refusal they could accept: I'm a lesbian. I was pleased to have found a loophole in the standard way of male/female relatedness but this play suffocated me:

*In a place where I want to be gray, I was forced to choose black or white.*

I quickly learned that being marginally accepted and given entry to male spaces brought its own set of expectations.

Strangled by a false sameness.

I sit listening to the most abhorrent language.

Words I'm usually protected from by my gender wash over me

I feel as though I am drowning in confluences that I have brought on by fixing my own identity

Some of my brother's desire(s) remain. Subtle, if palpable like the other rumors, insinuations that temporarily emerged. But becoming *la hermanita del crew* operated as a buffer zone. Made me grateful for fixity.

Attraction close enough to see  
sounds silenced by the invisible lines drawn  
a glass wall.

I watch our interactions on the other side of the looking glass at one anniversary celebration. While partying with the bois, I'd feel a tension much like the early days *at first*.

We look at the line and then smudge it  
anxious  
we avoid acknowledging it  
Once I am inside the crew, I find myself on the other side of the protection/violence dyad. I realize that the implicit desire to have me manifests itself in a desire to protect me from the desires of others. At times, it feels good to be on the inside of the crew because I'm saved from other advances from visitors who don't know me, who can't see the lines that connect us. At other times, the feeling is closer to fear. One day, the soon-to-be-exile arrives when a new floater arrives and launches into his declaration of love for a girl he's never met. He replies for me: "Hey! Back off. She's *la hermanita del camp*." With his eyes he glares an implicit *or else*.

Inside the violence/protection dyad, I feel the suffocating weight of jealousy familiar to lovers.

It manifests as volatile energy and quickly transfers to my own body: a deep feeling of dread in the very base of my belly. What's going to happen next? Frequently, my safety teetered on the brink of the precipice implied by such protection which threatened to transform at any moment, leaving me in a maddening descent toward his violence.



I heard about the vicious side of the soon-to-be-exiled who stood in as a kind of older brother for me many times. But, I often took the stories in with a sense of incredulousness that was slowly eroded as we spent more time together. Like being in the car, with his baby *jeva* singing "*Puro Teatro*" (pure theater) as we drove to the public showers in *el balneario* for a night time bath. She wails along with La Lupe, *lo tuyo es puro teatro, falsedad bien ensayada, estudiado simulacro*. (your love is pure theater, a well-rehearsed falsehood, and studied maneuvers). I notice a strange threat behind his question: "you know that's a feminist song?" She dismisses him, "Isn't it just a love song?" I remain silent in the back seat as they debate the validity of one woman's analysis of infidelity, of the flatness of sweet nothings that leave you feeling alone and empty. *played* Today I think they are both right. The ability to see through a man's pure theater, their falseness, just might be a feminist act. It just might be an act of love.

I remain unaware of the full implications of this discussion until I catch a fleeting glimpse of that other side that made him the exiled boy of the camp. It's an anniversary celebration and I'm busy trying to make conversation with all these visitors, allies and once-were-residents that have appeared for the festivities. As I am talking with Moncho, I see my brother from afar. He is not close enough to hear but I notice that he is angry. He is standing over his baby girl, facial expressions are accusatory and she, twenty years his junior, looks confused and then defiant. His body movements are wild and so foreign that I stop mid-sentence, looking puzzled. He doesn't hit her with his own hands, but stands above her as she looks up trying to calm him down and he

dumps a can of soda on her, throwing it into the ground before walking off toward the beach.

He protests later as I question his motives. But, *she asked for it*. He claimed she had been flirting with one of his bros all day, and he could even see she didn't have panties on.

*For as little as he and the star get together, I'm amazed at how similar their justifications for abuse are. Reprised victims and perpetrators.*

Squeamish, I wonder,  
am I  
***too far inside?***

I remain more silent than vocal about these contradictions. There were only a few others "like me." Two visitor allies are my contemporaries. My big brother tries to set me up with one on the first day she comes to visit with her girlfriend. When I remind him of their relationship he offers his own misogynist fantasy: *Maybe you can take them both.*

But I don't take either.

Shrug. Offer only the politically weak response: *she's not my type*.

At first, I discover I have to dodge similar advances with her. But after some time, we find a middle ground. A kindness that is based on recognition of being used by the soon-to-be-exiled: so many "borrowed" items never to be returned.

There were rumors of others. The bois would tell me of them, eager to point out a shared history. But, I didn't know about the first little sister, *la tromba marina* (waterspout),<sup>14</sup> until I caught a glimpse of her trapped memory in the margin of a photo.

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<sup>14</sup> Like other members of *La Coalición Playas Pa'l Pueblo* (Beaches for the People Coalition) *La tromba marina* or waterspout, was a marine life nickname given by Tito Kayak to members. He chose these

They say she was an intense fury, whose short life span was exactly like her nickname: a waterspout. Like the prelude to the rains, cloud covered sky, filled with a dense and fecund potential.

Tromba was not even 16 when they found her hanging around the outskirts of the camp, waiting for an invitation in. She had just been kicked out of her house for coming out and was then homeless. I long to talk to her, and try for weeks to glean what I can from various members, but no one even remembers her name. Most scratch their heads or look away for a time before coming up with memories themselves as fragmented as things are between current residents and the original intentions of the space. She only stayed on for a short time and because her stay was so short and so controversial there remain few strings left to the stories that link her (t)here.

The star, with his own troubles at home and in *campa*, treated her like his own. The relationship he didn't quite have with his own daughter, who mainly lived with her mom. I'm told that both Tromba and the star were extremely close at first. Together, they experienced a joy and familial love that they hadn't felt in a long time. One for her marginality. The other for his centrality. But both kept from joy all the same.

Momentarily, the Star and Outcast held each other in the embrace of recognition and (partial) acceptance.

Most shrug off my queries about her: She was difficult! Too difficult. Her age was one of the main sites of conflict; it became a familiar cover. It provided a language for

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names by whim but they usually describe some distinguishing characteristic of the person in question. A waterspout is an intense phenomenon that appears like a tornado over a body of water. Although it may seem that a waterspout brings the ocean out into the sky, a waterspout is actually connected to a cloud and represents a condensation of drops from the cloud that gets linked to the water temporarily before it breaks down.

discussing without engaging the uncomfortable fact of sexual difference. The elders wielded her age to dismiss her declaration: *she was too young to know*, they emphasize in a whisper. Another child disregarded by virtue of her age that locked her in a confused state. Just a child really. Besides, something had to be done! Her presence tarnished the image of camp. The youth protested but she needs us. Where else is she going to go? She made tenable an underlying tension between the old and the young. She caused the elements to condense and explode. The best way to deal with waterspouts is to get out of the way and to not investigate it any further. They tell me to let it go.

But she refused silence. Refused to live on the boundary between respectability and reputation and went about as she pleased. Even brought in her social worker turned lover. Lived her life with a bravado that brought out the ageist and mildly homophobic tendencies in this community of radicals.

The star, once like the father she had just lost, became her enemy. Violence crept in, he explained to me later with a face pained with unresolved anger. “I know I shouldn’t have done that, but I couldn’t take it anymore. I grabbed her face (thumb and index finger on her chin applying pressure) *No jodes más!*” Fuming, she was violent back and hit him: *wakata*.

A slap that guaranteed her exile  
But like the strong women who came after  
she refused to be subdued.

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*(Please note: this line is not actual. As I learned about la convivencia's importance by leaning into other spaces of resistance. I place it here for you dear reader. So you can make a shift into another space/time. I encourage you to draw your own lines between them for yourself.)*

## ***La Huelga 2010***

### *Pardon the Inconvenience/ We are Building Another Country*

A few hundred locked themselves inside the gates at the wee hours of dawn, a few hundred made it possible to build another country. I arrive after it had been declared but not yet crafted. The tents have not been put up yet. *Todavía no hemos vacilado con la idea de quedarnos.* But the votes to stay are unanimous and the excitement of those activists from socialist organizations who are already old travelers of the route(s) of lucha. They report the decisions of the collectives at the other gates voting on whether to stay the night or not. As they say each name, one by one they repeat the affirmative: *que se queda* (they will stay). *Que se queda. Que se queda.*<sup>15</sup> The energy shifts and we start to imagine that we could just stay after all. And everything is possible. There is room for everything.

Living in the space signaled by the early morning hours they arrive(d) perpetually a country in construction feels like the freshness of dew on the feet like travelling the campus in the early am with bird enthusiasts and plant experts. We spot a few hummingbirds drinking from a flower in the plaza in front of the theater reminding us of the resilience of the campus, of the island's life. Or like wet feet, *to' enchumbao del barro*. Searching for coquís in the dark. Sharing a flashlight. Fertile as mud. Of the earth, open to molding and to imagination.

Approaching the campus I feel an overwhelming sense of excitement. Jittery as I prepare to cross over into another land. And I wonder now, *is this the feeling of radical autonomy that Bey describes in mystical, poetic terms when describing T.A.Z?* I feel

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<sup>15</sup> One excellent video made by Noelia González Casiano of the first days of the strike circulated online and documents this moment. See <http://vimeo.com/11221665>

jitters because I know that its impossible to know what I would find inside. The feelings we normally associate with uncertainty are transformed into a love for it. From these moments, I learn to make peace with the possibilities that are represented through it. The sheer pleasure of that (revolutionary) temporality. Of knowing that you could never know all the beauty, all the creative manifestations of that collective refusal that the space signaled.

Inside the campus one finds many different ways to be present with/for others. It serves as a welcome contrast to systemic logics that encourage standardization and uniformity. Inside there are many routes being built through movement and experimentation. Not with plans and maps, but with proposals and ideas. Some are crafted in poetry and others in laughter *el janguero*. Others in wait, quiet anticipation. Then later, when I hear of my friends complain about those that went for the fun of it—*que se fueron de picnic*, I shift uncomfortably realizing that I could easily be considered part of this other crew: the pleasure seeking committee. Not exactly of course but since I didn't arrive there as a researcher, my intense infatuation could easily be seen as nothing more than an emotional clinging to a moment I didn't quite understand. But being into the environment of the strike and the feeling of openness did fit into this other field or presence of those who didn't know exactly what they were doing, but did it anyway. True: some folks were really political (in the narrow sense of the word) but pleasure seeking was a big part of what was enticing about the atmosphere was that understanding that you could enjoy yourself and still be radical.

Building a homespace was a bit different from *campa*. There was already a structured landscape there—the campus itself—where many had spent at least months,

if not years walking across. The campus was re-visioned for a new kind of liberation that like *campa* too had an ecological grounding. Things we didn't even do in our own house before arriving here. Not to mention the re-visioning for residency. *As I prepared to draft this, friends urged me to tell the readers of the bathrooms that re-signified the campus.* Handmade showers—each with their own special touches—adorn each encampment. The wooden panel box of social science division, or the flimsy plastic shower curtain hanging from some rescued rope behind the museum in the Humanities camp. *La torre* (the clock tower) was terrain of *el huerto crew* (The garden crew). A collective that was of many different individuals who came to *el huerto* with a shared interest in the natural world and the beauty of the strike. The beauty that they hoped could be for the whole island.

And there were other spatial distinctions as campus was retrofitted for revolution. The radio station, strike radio—the voice(s) of *huelguistas* occupied *el consejo de estudiantes* (student council building), itself at the very center of campus. Strike Radio became the nucleus of the occupation. From the monolithic voice of the student body symbolized by *el consejo*, it transformed “the voice” into a cacophony of messages dispatched in real time (which for us in this techno saturated time means of course, live streamed). Strike radio was an ideal place to tune in for a glimpse of the movement's perspective of the movement and the beauty was how it shifted depended on which show you tuned into or what was happening outside the gates. This other country's voice was heteroglossic *desde adentro*. Literally.

Just a cursory walk around in those days you could find a poetry reading, or a mural being painted or an intense discussion, or watering plants, seated by the plants.

To find out what routes being traveled and what tools were being invented to cultivate radical fleeting terrains of autonomy. Revolutionary time requires movement: a commitment to zig zag slowly through the campus (unless you were lucky enough to have a bici or be able to borrow someone's). Dialogue with others was one of the best ways to access the creative spirit.

Inside rhythms lived in/through/on difference. And break apart familiar critiques of community: that it legitimates new social hierarchies, that the people imagined to share an identity are not identical (Johnson 2002). But it took some time before those hierarchies were palpable.

It took  
stagnation before the break  
(then) Repression  
To manifest

#### *Under New Administration*

The past can provoke hysteria.  
Latent at first.  
*When there was room for everything*

Both participatory democracy and anarchists claim to promote "real" democracy, although they imagine them on (slightly) different registers. Participatory democracy is made through collaborative efforts, a horizontal model without leaders. Everyone's voice is judged to be as valid as the other. Anarchy is collective coordination without rulers (*not without rules or order*) and in that sense, they are quite similar projects.

Although anarchists are best known for their dramatic protest actions, they spend most of their energy on mutual projects aimed at constructing radically



alternative frameworks for daily life. A very real similitude present between the project of building another country and the work of anarchists, most responsible for popularizing the term prefigurative politics before it became the primary conceptual framework for understanding new forms of contemporary political engagement. But it wasn't long before I realized that *Anarchy does not = Participatory Democracy*,

When some members of the collective stopped taking slogans so metaphorically and more literally *Si en vez de vino* (Instead of wine)...And broke into the *casita del poder* (house of power) and emptied her cabinets as if they were also a symbol of power's decadence and the poor spending decisions of the university budget by having a party. Some judged it as irresponsible decadence. Surely, on some level it was. But so were many other parties sponsored by *huelguistas* inside the gates. Besides, the acts committed inside were not all that different from other kinds of acts committed outside. Debates ensue:

Person A: If the window was fixed, all the damages were fixed and no one got hurt. So what's the big fuckin deal?

Person B: The big deal es que es UNA CHOTA! (a snitch) He can't be trusted!

Person C: Come on, he's not a rat! It's not like he went out and started giving information to the cops about the movement.

I remain silent but found the whole thing kind of hysterical. A protest against poor spending was made by poorly spending what was never meant for them.

I quickly learned that it was the damages to *la casita del poder* that was the source of controversy. That house must be respected if our *lucha* is to be respected. Suddenly a group party that danced across and destroyed the seat of power spirals in and out—towards a scapegoating one individual—and to the collective. Five students were first implicated in the incident (rumor has it the number has been raised to 25), but

one's name kept being mentioned again and again. Time becomes much less expansive and much more demanding (in terms of speed, and direction of one's energies into resolving this issue). Despite the improbability of a solo flier, one person is already becoming the responsible party

And an excessive amount of time spent speculating on appropriate judgments concerning what to do with the outlier.

A cacophonous litany descends:

I agree. he knew the deal, it's not like the strike just started.

And then the retrospective look:

- I know but it's to be expected! Didn't you hear? There have always been problems with him. No one ever bothered to do anything about it. Just let him float from one campsite to another. And now see what happens?

The pensive, looking for the good in others:

- Unless this was about provocation /but even so, we don't want to give the police any reason to come inside.

The dismissive:

- Well, I say that a person like that could just as easily tell the police everything. If he wants to tell on the others in lieu of taking responsibility for his actions, tirandolo al medio las otras personas que estaban alli. I don't want him talking to the police.

The moral:

- Am I in the wrong strike? I'd throw out more than a few of you from here. Why are we even debating what to do with him? Throw them all out I say, not just him.

Another interjects and her surprise seems to satisfy the others who are seated alongside him. *Nene!* No! That's too many people to throw out! We won't have a strike left. But the morale stays firm:

- kick them all out, even if its only 3 people left, it has to be those that are clear about their responsibilities, and the image we are trying to promote.

The realist(s):

- Come on: People from the security committee were also there throwing up champagne on the same night of the break in. Coincidence? I think not!
- I mean, I understand wanting to fuck shit up. That's cool. But I don't just do whatever I want in a strike, I have to consider others. I have to consider how things will look; I can't just do it alone. I need them to tell me, go ahead man. Do your propaganda, paint that wall, etc. because I need them. And they will need me. I want to do the crazier stuff, but I need them to do the investigating, to go to the courts. It's a process of give and take. This was all taking.

I hear too, others share their discontent with the whole process: I'm sick of this shit man. These people in here are not my leaders. They can't tell me what to do. They are proving to be intransigent as the administration. The limits to the living together as liberation manifest here as the tension between a need to govern and a need for freedom. They remind us that even flexible political structures and rules of living can hamper the process of making emancipation dreams into a material reality.

There was not simple resolution to the dilemma brought out by the break in at *la casita*. Eventually the *huelguista* who had been the scapegoat for the incident left the strike. And while I don't think that the situation was forgotten, it stopped eclipsing everything else. But the issue of roles and of right behavior was left unresolved. The issues of what methods and what kind of spirit of struggle would again emerge after the strike had been lifted and before the sequel began.

### *Reflecting and Conversing (after): The Role of Women*

In the moments after there's a lot of time to think about what was done and what to do better. I attend an informal conversation organized by the Humanities committee whose purpose is to reflect on the past strike and to engage in self-reflexive critique in order to

improve the future strike (which by now, most recognize is more than just a possibility—it's imminent).

While we wait for the event to begin, I notice many familiar faces: both those folks that I know to be hardcore activists and some just neophytes of resistance. It takes some time before I notice that the ones in charge—a facilitator, timekeeper, person to give introductions and lay ground rules, as well as the person adding names to the stack—are all women. Although I am used to seeing many women in organizing roles, I am intrigued by this absence of men.

After what seems like a long period of waiting around for more folks to show up, Ruth begins introductions: *we're a little behind schedule or demasiado (too much)*, the qualification spoken as an afterthought that reveals an emotional tenor marked by a twinge of frustration. Her introduction is mixed with a brief history, rules of engagement and a series of questions to guide the discussion. Her language and pace seem to quicken as each moment passes, indicating a rising sense of agitation. As she offers a summary of the movement, she is quick to undercut its validity (its T)ruth value. *This is a history, o más bien, un relato of the process we have just lived through (el proceso que hemos pasado)*. Her way of describing the strike as a process that activists have passed through creates remarkable resonance with the anthropological term of liminality. I am anxious to see whether that passing through has brought a greater sense of fixity, of order or whether it has brought a clarity that is as unfixed as the early days of occupation. The picture she paints is modest. *Relato* does not articulate in the same way with truth as history does. The corrective is significant,

leading us toward story, or legend all the while taking ownership for a narration that she recognizes to be partial.

Her description of the strike starts off in a relatively standard way: prefacing the strike by national contexts of Law 7 and the election of Luis Fortuño as what sparked a resistance to neoliberal policies and the attack on university autonomy. Soon after she introduces the context, she draws our attention to the topic that the collective wants us to focus our reflection on. It's composed of a litany of internal dramas—*rumors, internal divisions, violence, chantaje emocional* (emotional coercion)—that weakened the strike's potency as a vehicle for social liberation and justice.

When she finishes, there is an enthusiastic applause and then Silence.

Frustrated one of the coordinators speaks out:  
*We came here to talk so say something!*

The first to speak is a sage (male) activist who already has lived through a long life of lucha and a longer future ahead. He begins by dismissing her invitation to dialogue.  
*The process was so long and complicated, we shouldn't pretend like we could even cover it all in one conversation.*

Ignoring the call to reflect on the strengths/weaknesses and problems internal to the struggle and starts to provide a corrective to her *relato*, which quickly becomes Truth. Our ability to be accurately reflexive is dependent on our ability to understand the politics of privatization of the university which has been occurring piecemeal for many years before the struggle that we were protagonists of (*que hemos protagonizado*).

Vanguard much?

After he spoke, the room was silent (again). Even more silent after he took his three minute turn, which was windy and twisty and didn't even describe the strike or anything she asked the participants to consider. Still in the preamble of his discourse, others (the introducer included) invite him to take another turn.

He is eager to dismiss the nickname, *huelga creative*. This was a militant act! It wasn't *la huelga mas light* or this artistic, peace and love performance.

My hopefulness that this will be an isolated incident is weakened as each person who takes a turn after him moves further from the topic at hand. It is reflected by a reticence to be reflective about the internal drama that was introduced as the topic of discussion and the second, a refusal to think back, instead an overwhelming tendency to think forward, about the changing conditions and impending crisis for *lucha*.

The introducer is the first one to speak after the male activist. After a gap of silence, she enters the discussion again and nudges everyone back to her introduction. She thanks him for his comments but again suggests that what might be useful to discuss instead are levels of militancy. *Not everyone can or will enter a struggle with the same levels of experience or understanding about the current moment.* How we might make a strength of these differences without trying to homogenize them. She invites us to dialogue about how to get more people involved where they are *right now*. Her question was about how to promote that kind of solidarity or sympathy with the movement was well taken. It took us backwards and forwards at the same time, urging us to recall that some who attended this very conversation came to the first day of the stoppage without any sense of political maturity learned so much because there was space for them to enter without judgment from other participants.

Another man jumps in but not to acknowledge her question, or to grapple or converse with the challenges of accommodating without squashing different levels of experiential knowledge or training in activist logics. Like the other man who first spoke, he is a seasoned activist. And one well respected by the other *huelguistas*. He wants to talk about strategies of *lucha*. Again as his brother in the struggle, he makes a reference to the violence that made the strike possible asking almost rhetorically:

If we are prepared for what's coming  
Next?

He speaks of the need to distinguish between pacifism and civil disobedience, asking participants to embrace the active aggression inherent in being disobedient. Another jumps in: yes! *I hate violence as a problem in the society but I also have a problem with pacifism because people misinterpret it to mean inaction. Ghandi generated violence with his actions. We have to be prepared to turn ourselves into a political problem and realize that this will definitely generate violence against us.*

After about 20 minutes of racquetball discussion between those eager to give participants a history lesson and those interested in advocating for a guerilla warfare training program, one woman, Adriana Mulero, who is also a very experienced activist brings us back to the question of the inner life of the struggle and of the role of women. I found it surprising that despite her participation in other moments of the struggle, she includes a preamble before lodging her criticism as something she always wanted to discuss. To bring present but never did.

Our strike operated by the terms of the *la democracia burguesa* (bourgeois democracy). Yes, the strike did diversify and open the bases of communication but we did not also taking that more radical step to change consciousness. I

wonder why it is that 74% of the student body is made up of women but in our negotiating committee only one woman served as a representative. How is this possible? *Las mujeres meten mano a la organización pero no al liderato, en las caras publicas habían muy pocas* (women actively organize but aren't in the leadership, in terms of the public face, they were very few of us). *Y yo entiendo que hay mujeres que se aguantan, y hay otras que sienten que no tienen preparación pero eso se hace en la práctica y este semestre, yo quiero ver más mujeres asumiendo el rol público.* (And I understand that some women hold back, and others feel that they aren't prepared to assume a public role but this is done in practice and this semester, I want to see women assume a public role). I don't want to see us committing the same errors in the history, *la mujer atrás siempre* (the woman always behind the man). *Y muchas veces no salimos en la historia, nos pasan por encima* (And many times we don't come out in the historical record, they pass right over us).

And I thought immediately, if she thinks this and never spoke, what about those who hardly ever take a mic? How many of them feel silenced and marginal? Her comments point us to the problems of representation and suggest a relationship between the public face and internal dramas, roles that women as much as men subscribe to but again this invitation to dialogue about the meaning of struggle, which might also help to guide discussions about what to do in the future is dropped. As another speaker ushers us back to violence.

why is it so hard to think the challenges through *la convivencia*?  
Why are we so unwilling to face it?

Another woman chimes in as she tries to draw others back (in again). Her disappointment is palpable.

This is a small group but I hope its beginning of something larger. I wanted to bring up the question of women and their role as spokespersons or even on a more basic level, their role as those who speak, who take the mic. If Adri didn't bring it up, then I was going to. *Nosotras la tenemos q combatir nosotras mismas* (we have to fight it ourselves). I struggle with this myself but we have to change ourselves and take our rightful place at the table.



*A beautiful moment of solidarity perhaps.* But, later this same woman denied that there was any real problem with the shared responsibilities of men and women and their roles when I interviewed her individually. Brief moments of vulnerability are gone once the crowd disperses. And right answers are shored up again. Even so, I find it disconcerting that she begins her comments by dismissing the possibility for critical reflection here: *we are all on the same page*. And I wonder what that page is? I'd like to read it because I see people talking past one another. Each airing his/her frustration but not conversing with one another, not dialoguing about what errors were made, what attitudes produce internal drama of *la convivencia*. During the strike, there was a sense that folks talked to each other, imagined with each other. But in the midst of such a stagnate(d) conversation, I wonder if that's the idealism talking. Maybe there was a lot more of this, of dropped proposals and unfinished projects that I have forgotten.

Two more women add to the second female's observation.

The first

- Yes, I agree with what's been said so far but I think the problem with women's limited contribution has more to do with the negative perspective that people have of a strong woman vs. a strong man than women's desire or not to participate in more public roles. For men, being aggressive is positive but in a woman, that same aggression is something that would disqualify her from her candidacy as a leader. As a negotiator. You all know of the example of our own strike. When a woman, who I don't want to name said to Ygri (Rivera) that she should look at her in the eyes when she spoke to her, its a reason that we disqualified her from being considered for the national negotiating committee. Myself included. If we let ourselves be convinced by the gender prejudice, nothing is going to change.

The second:

- In some ways we were successful because the administration committed so many errors, these mistakes helped us as a movement because I think many times, we even were falling off (*flaqueando*) when these matters happened.

After a short pause where others take the discussion back again to the matters of violence and of militancy, another woman speaks. She's one of the organizers—and has been taking names for the stack. Her tone tells me these women had a gripe they wanted to get settled as she tries to pull us back to the original call:

Bringing it back to the issue of internal politics, I just wanted to say that from the outside it looked as if we were all unified but that inside it was a different story. There were so many discussions and fights that brought us to a level of inactivity by the end. Yeah, I know the nicknames of each committee started out as a bit of a joke, for me they came to represent the question of class that we need to confront, *y que no podemos pichar* (we just can't keep ignoring it). Some students are really in tough spots economically and others aren't. And this will make a difference in the future when we talk about strategies and the actions we might be willing to undertake. Some of us are willing to defend the accessibility for the public university because we don't have any other options. Others may have an interest in accessibility but having capital, can also just go somewhere else (on the island or outside of it) and attend another university where things are not falling apart.

So many missed opportunities. Passing through the collective who speaks past one another. Like the criticism of a revolutionary potential made weak by dispersion and fragmentation. I can't help but see these same dilemmas about roles and representations refracted through the missed opportunities to look at one's own practices in the community of others who do the same. But things devolve quickly into fear and anticipation about the strike that is to come.

They are coming strong and we are few.  
They won't make the same mistakes as before.  
The *lucha* continues for me, the strike isn't anything more than a strategy.  
Let's not get stuck to the methods and let's be willing to change.  
To evolve.

Yes, but into what? Some gun toting, not going to take it anymore trumped up version of revolutionaries past? The choices seem to narrow, a past buried and a present ignored for the anticipatory moment to come.

*Capucha/carpeteo.winter strike and the fledgling spirit of lucha*

The mask (la capucha) wasn't a new strategy. But it became the focus of everyone's attention when the struggle "started" up again in winter. The stoppage had been a failure (in the very sense that Juris describes "affective solidarity" can be generative for those within the movement while a representational disaster in the media) after the image of the destroyed van appeared on all the front pages of the newspapers. So when the Hostos celebration, an activity to commemorate el Natalicio de Eugenio María de Hostos, was planned for the day before classes were to begin on 1.11.11, folks thought of it as a media comeback. "We will defy the moratorium on protest non-violently" and rise into the favor of the public again.

The event itself was declared a success by participants. But when the official proceedings ended without incident, it had only just begun. High off the success of the peaceful event, students called for a march through the campus, in defiance of the police who stood so close to our sides at every turn. The campus is filled with officers. They line up around us while the most enthusiastic officers lightly swing their weapon, waiting for the instructions to begin to attack.

The students are well prepared and speak of the police as if they aren't there. One student yells, "they're looking for someone, and they're looking for someone."

Keep moving along.” As if to say, *estamos ensayando* (this is just a test run) don’t let them break our form.

And the words I heard on the chaotic night of the stoppage seem to be at play here:

*Somos los que tienen que pensar! (we are the ones who have to think).*

In an effort to demand a right to defense that dominated conversations about new tactics and outcomes, they begin by defying the tyranny of monopoly on violence the government has over its constituency, creating an image of self-defense. Of a radical faceless mob—the front of the march was led by *encapuchados* in a u-shaped formation. Each of these student “leaders” carried shields made out of garbage cans; they were long and had a rounded shape at the edges. Although not all of the participants wore *capuchas*, the formation created a “face” of the movement that was powerful in its anonymity.

As a strategy of representation, the shift to masking the leaders was an attempt to assert their right to anonymity—in the face of so many agents of the state, surveillance and the threat of arrests—at the same time that they asserted their right to militancy. As such, their shields were meant to signal protection and that although they were non-violent protestors, they were serious about their right to protect themselves from state aggression. *La capucha* was meant to signal the fact that students freedom of expression was limited by the presence of the police and as a strategy that would also protect the identity of the mass of students, not just those with the capucha on, but also those in the march, because having these folks with their capuchas flanking the front and part of the sides of the march made it difficult to discern who was in the crowd.

Moreover, such a formation was also meant to make it difficult for the police to grab one of the participants.

But the public does not understand. They are enraged by the turn: *why have our beautiful and docile students become so radical?* They shake their heads and begin to draw the line of separation. From a public once so filled with empathy for the students— ¡ay bendito! Lo que quieren es estudiar (Oh poor babies! What they want to do is study)—to a suspect paternalistic attitude: why wear *capuchas* if you’ve nothing to hide? There are limits to radicalism, clearly. From the public point of view the changing rules of the game matter little. *Now they must be doing something wrong if they hide their faces!* A woman in a local store, I frequented regularly who always greets me and tends to treat my radical study with the same degree of kindness and sympathy that students were treated with before sees my face the day after Hostos and says, “*well now they’ve done it! Se van a joder!*” (*They are screwed.*) And, she seems satisfied with her judgment. As she glares at me, her face belies another message: And don’t look at me for kindness! After all, it’s all your fault.

Internally too, members of the collective were shocked at this (sudden) display of violence in the student center. No apparent confrontation with the police, no provocation in the moment. *But we didn’t want any real violence!* One complains to me in the moments after.

The tenuous bridge is broken as a group breaks form, and goes renegade. Although their faces are covered like many of the marchers—the ones who enter the student center are different from the others. They throw smoke bombs into the Dean’s office of the School of Business Administration, then break a few computers in the Education

Department's library and create chaos in the dining hall of the University Student Center. Upon entering they break one of the glass windows of the center, whose walls except for a few that border other parts of the building are made of glass. They throw down tables, and chairs and broke one of the windows of the center, yelling "hay huelga no hay clases" (we're striking, there are no classes).

In many ways, I see the Hostos celebration as the first of the final fragmentation(s). Months later, I scroll through many YouTube videos trying to verify some of my very confused notes of the day. I feel a sickness rising up, an emotional silencing that attacks my throat, closing it up and choking me. In this moment, I long to be some other kind of ethnographer—one that believes in objectivity and distance—and not cry as I watch the dream shatter. Not cry as I watch this beautiful movement decline. For all Rancière and other theorists (even me) write about the fantasies of the community—for all the cynical retorts about the (im)possibility of social transformation it still hurts to see this one bleed. To see it fragment into pieces and official lines signed by the plenary.

Two representatives and spokespersons are interviewed as the event is in progress and they reply differently. Perhaps it is just the pressure of the moment. Or maybe there's the first signs of the fissures here, in the very same juncture. One is a much more seasoned activist and known to be a socialist. He tells the presses as the sounds and movements behind him confirm that the students are being attacked: "as long as there is violence imposed against us, we will defend ourselves anyway we can." On the other side of campus, another new.leftist.but.ideological.position.unclear denies responsibility for the chaos: "there is no way to justify the actions but in events so large,

we can't be responsible for everyone.” In their different approaches to qualifying violence, it became clear that the movement was not “unified.” The tension that drained in *campa* thus found its way here too. Though the motivation was primarily externally caused—the closure brought into being through state repression—it created its own tyranny eventually strangling the multiple spirit(s) that inhabited the first strike, and the *lucha* for liberation.

This movement is being destroyed from the inside out. And it's not because there are some folks infiltrating the movement but rather because there are fractures inside that the movement cannot deal with/afraid as they are of very real government repression and the closing door to an alternative. It is a strange coincidence but I've seen the videos. And I know at least a few of them are active participants of the movement. Their decision to disregard the vote of the collective points to the discord within the movement, and is suggestive of a lack of agreement on where to go from where they were. It also shows that the more impositions posed from the outside, the more divisions are reflected inside. With increasing borders/limits of the community. Can you still be a part of the community of strikers if you explicitly deny following the dictates of consensus?

The events lived through the Hostos celebration shaped the structure of the movement as well as student attitudes towards one another. There was a rapid decline in diversity of the movement. Those who were drawn into the first strike because of the opportunity it offered to take a break from everyday life and participate creatively in it, were no longer around because they felt that being around the police always living with the threat of violence was too traumatic. Over time, they sought to regain a sense of

“unity” but this control also contributed to a silencing of minority positions which were once welcomed in the first strike.

The question of what kind of resistance was legitimate became the central focal point of subsequent assembly meetings, particularly prevalent in the emergency plenary session called after the Hostos event. The room was filled both with students who had been participating in the movement all throughout but, there were many new faces that I had never seen at any other function before. Some new faces, clearly unaware of the procedures for participation talked off to the sides to anyone who would listen to them, detracting from the attention of others around them to the table of students who were leading the session. But these folks had not lived together and did not know how to coexist with one another and manage such discordant positions. Their energy was distinctly different from the always ongoing side conversations that usually were composed of the smokers and those who were only minimally interested in the process of enacting participatory democracy—much more interested in living in the open break created by it. They’d come in and leave at will occasioned by hunger or general boredom. Even still, these outliers who softly talked to one another about the heat, plans for later or some other mundane topic covered by small talk knew what was going on because in the first strike, activists almost without exception attended smaller meetings at the campsite they stayed in. In contrast, these students had no sense of procedure or anything of the sort, they were just outraged by the movement and wanted to come to air their grievances.

The final statement that was issued by the student movement was simply titled, “Declaración del Pleno de Estudiantes Huelguistas” (Plenary Statement of Student



Strikers). It consisted in a list of bullet points. Three points that gesture to *la convivencia* and strategies of *lucha* are included among the many:

1. we reject with disapproval the vandalism committed in the student center. These acts were not part of the approved actions of this body and they go against *the spirit of our struggle*.
2. We assert our right to defend ourselves against assaults by the police or any repressive government body. This right applies to any human being who feels their safety and physical integrity is threatened.
3. We claim the use of hoods as a way to protect comrades being arrested or penalized for participating in demonstrations and public activities. We reject the irresponsible use where the hood is used to commit acts that have not been approved by strikers and go against the spirit of struggle of the Student Movement.”

Rules of living with police and other students who are not *huelguistas* might be reprised into something like this:

- Violence is justifiable only in defense/never as an aggression.  
But when is it legitimate to feel threatened by police? What is the limit?  
I certainly felt threatened walking around the campus with them there.  
Waiting and watching.
- All actions must be pre-approved by the new administration to see if it fits within the preordained spirit of struggle (although, really this isn’t news).  
Efficiency is paramount. Horizontalism won’t work. Let’s go back to the coordination committee.
- Although surveillance (*el carpeteo*) is ongoing and hard to track, we think that by wearing a mask at a public event will somehow protect us from arrest.  
And then on the other hand, there are those who think that only those with something to “hide” would wear *la capucha*. (like me, who misses work to go to protests and knows that the secretaries watch the news in our break room at lunchtime).

The spirit of struggle becomes a tyrannical phrase. One with clear boundaries.

So uncharacteristic from the first strike and earlier moments. How can we inhabit such a suffocating space? And only those who adhere to the coordinator’s project or are

literally on the verge of dropping out because of the onerous cost of the fiscal stabilization fee continue to fight.

It becomes increasingly difficult to find out what the plan is beforehand, making it hard for new folks to join in. I notice the increase of secrecy in everything. One day I called a good friend to find out how the first day of the strike went and she sounded strange, clearly restraining herself and she spoke so generally it seemed she was speaking to me in a code I couldn't decipher. When I saw her in person later she apologized for "being weird" and explained that people were paranoid about discussing events over texts and phone calls. At the same time, information about events was disseminated over text messages and being in the know depended on being in the right person's phone book, so that you'd receive a forwarded message (or as was more often the case, many of the same message over and over). Even these messages only briefly described a meeting time and place, rarely described the nature of the action. I would have countless incidents like this one in later moments when an activist become uneasy and awkward as if by accident he has walked into a topic he forgot he wasn't supposed to mention.

As one of the correspondents and co-founders of Radio Huelga, Ricardo referenced this closure, describing it as a streamlining of perspectives brought about by a loss of diversity:

"Well part of the fact is that the second strike we were basically the same people, we already had gone thru a whole process together so we'd come to see things in a similar way, but we lost some of that flexibility that was so useful in the first strike."

According to him, the approximate number of total participants in the second strike was 300 in all. In the first strike, that was the number they ended with but participation

soared well over 2,000 in the earlier periods. In sum, the second strike was more homogenous, and it was also therefore more hegemonic than the first strike.

*Coda: La Convivencia as the Site of Resistance*

As I explained at the outset of this chapter, the experiment in writing in the above is searching for the best way to “call out” problems related to living together, signaling how they each might also relate to issues which limit our ability to create the conditions for social transformation. The underside of *lucha* that I want to make clear comes about in the messiness of struggle, problems that are wont to become exaggerated in spaces of resistance which are also doubling as homespace. Although the problems were in some ways distinct—at campa about demographics and refusal to dialogue or be accountable to a structure and in the UPR about the closure of spaces for dialogue and the limiting of the vision of what the “other country” could and should be—the affective dimensions of being there when such problems surfaced were similar. I do not pose solutions but rather aim to show that without allowing space for dissensus to flourish, the creativity of the movement and indeed, the possibilities for radical transformation were constricted severely.

All cases were explored in an experimental manner, that is to say, to use a form that foregrounds the affective dimensions of the struggle for inclusion over the “facts” of what actually happened. In earlier iterations, these vignettes straddled the boundaries between prose and poetry but I used much more poetic form and much less prose. Partially because of the responses of my readers, I have moved further from the poetic than I would have liked. I found it challenging to engage in a play with form that

disguises the details of the events while making clear how such events challenge us to consider whether the movement has been successful in rescuing a space truly of the public. In part, this is because I wanted the context to be clear enough so that the reader is not simply left with an evocation of affects but also with an idea of what caused the conflicts. In so doing, I aimed to reflect a theoretical preoccupation with how revolutionary impulse can strangle certain differences by marginalizing them: a process that works as much through the form as much as through the content.

Although I realize that such moments will be legible to anyone who is informed about these spaces or has been a participant in them, I hope that they are written about in a general enough manner so that they might be useful to other movements and to those readers who have little to no information about the peculiarities of these spaces. Since form and content are interdependent, I found it essential to write of these silences in an experimental mode, even more radically different than the other chapters. That is to say, I attempt to write about these internal dramas in such a way that while the issue becomes obvious, the details remain oblique. In so doing, I'm trying to still honor the things that remained underground, while also bringing to light to question the limits of the collective. I hope that the chapter itself has demonstrated the processual nature of social transformation and shown how such processes can be hampered by external conditions as much as internal ways of dealing with them. Overall, I have aimed to underscore the radically uneven pace of social transformation and a serious degree of ambivalence over how to decolonize the self, and one's way of being with others.

In my retelling, vignettes are meant to produce an affect in the reader that is consonant with my own feeling of entanglement in the histories I recorded. That is to

say, I am fully aware of the ways that I did not speak out or criticize actions which may have (or may not have) changed as a result of my speaking and I do my best to center those preoccupations and divergences here. In the field context, we often have to do the opposite in order to preserve already fragile fledging relationships with our interlocutors. Although each set of vignettes written in this chapter were driven by an interest in uncovering the limits to the collective while also protecting the collective, the form did vary to accommodate my relationship or entanglement with the questions explored. Given the fact that my interlocutors in *campa* rarely saw problems of getting along as central to the struggle to rescue this parcel of land, in those vignettes I have literally centered my own silences, interior thoughts and emotions in the middle of the page. And yet, since these words and thoughts were not part of the explicit discussions had at the site, they appear in small font, as a thought that occupies the very center of my thinking now and colors the way that I remember the space today.

In distinction to the issues brought to light in *campa*, in the UPR student strike, I described events that stayed in house but were very much a topic of intense debate. In these debates, I had no choice but to speak and choose sides. My position that efforts to define the limits of the collective and legitimate actions (*vis-à-vis*) questions of violence itself imposed violent boundaries drove my interest in these contentious issues. Here my sense of entanglement was distinct. I found myself more ambivalent than most about the validity of these actions and those feelings are what I try to center there. Differences aside, the reader will notice a similar movement of the vignettes which begin first by giving the spaces a geographic relevance that introduces one to the beauty of the space/time of radical resistance that points to what pulls you into the collective.

Then moving deeper into the issues that keep revolutionary time from being realized at all moments.

By centering such questions that have been seen as marginal to the movement, I have endeavored to argue that it is only from daily life that we can craft sustainable subjectivities. To create a mini model, in search of non-proprietary community we have to realize we are our visions manifest. Our treatment of others, especially our comrades in the struggle, is essential to bringing forth larger structural changes, more just futures. We may not think alike, but if we can't work with our own allies and friends, we can't ever bring social change about.

## **Artivism: Unbounded Strategies of Consciousness Raising**

The artistic interventions are difficult to follow. If you're lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, you witness their emergence. More often, one hears of them after the fact. Excited chatter punctuated with exclamations: ¡Que hermosura! ¡Que belleza! ¡Qué asco! (what beauty; how disgusting). All feelings are permissible. Performance serves as something to awaken something unknown in you and it cares much less for how that awakening is experienced and what affects it evokes. Instead, the interventions serve as beautiful inspiration an invitation to suspend habitual ways of thinking and inhabiting the world. Motivated by their own tiredness of being frustrated, they take to the streets to make others feel anything but helpless/ anything but trapped. Flowering possibilities. Artistic interventions reveal your hidden capacity to you. In their audacity. In their resolute creativity. (Field notes excerpt: May 12, 2010)

This chapter examines an array of activist interventions that flourished as a result of students' 62-day occupation of the UPR—acts which were so dominant they led to the strike's moniker of “the creative strike” (*la huelga creativa*). By calling such interventions artivism, I mean highlight that artistic production cannot be disentangled from the project of activist organizing. As such, I differentiate artivism from the new media innovations such as Radio Huelga (strike radio)—a station that was completely run by *huelguistas* and live streamed on the internet, available on iPhone and Droids or *Rojo Gallito*—a journalist collective that maintained a blog-styled newspaper. Although these forums were technologically innovative, they served the same function as traditional strategies of consciousness-raising by providing an alternative to mainstream media reporting through on the ground reports and by offering varied internal perspectives about the strike. In contrast, artivism is distinguished by a

disinterest (and even to a degree, inability) on the part of performers in controlling the message that spectators take away from the viewing. However, unlike traditional forms of consciousness raising, activism grabbed the public attention in a way that other more tedious and still vital practices of raising consciousness did not.<sup>1</sup> One of the most fascinating outcomes of them was their capacity to stir up the affect of viewers, making them feel a sense of political possibility, catapulted into a revolutionary time. As the above field excerpt makes clear, I could perceive this affect regardless of whether I literally observed it or heard about it after.

Many of my interlocutors considered the first strike to be more radical than the second, and definitely the most radical movement in recent history (second only to Vieques for those who had been participants of that movement or close to others who had).<sup>2</sup> I argue that the understanding of the *huelga creativa* as more militant had to do with the predominance of activist interventions rather than conditions of the strike. Indeed, the second strike, which was understood to be far less successful, students faced

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<sup>1</sup> When a resistance space is emergent, naming is crucial. Because artistic consciousness raising projects were so consonant with the strike's success and well regard in the public eye, I will limit the chapter to focus on the UPR student strike of Spring/Summer 2010. Despite *campa*'s absence in the text proper, I want to underscore that in individual interviews with allies and once-were residents of *campa*, I learned that activism was an important part of the struggle there. At this stage, I am convinced that there is an even larger claim to be made here regarding the relationship between art and politics. Despite the real presence of artistic interventions in the early years, I had difficulty finding documentation of activism and could not rely on participant observation since the climax of *campa* has long been passed through. Inspired by the student movement, I was eager to try to create programming for *campa*, to try to make it a "useful" space not only for the public, but also for social justice struggles. While these efforts did have some success, leading to a series of activities—the fifth anniversary celebration which included an installation of photographs of the campsite at different periods and a performance of a play that followed the privatization of the coastline; the civil disobedience workshop to train participants for the student strike sit-in brigades and a workshop on ecological farming—it did not lead to resident lead programming or organizing efforts. This is an issue which sheds light on the ethical conduct of the ethnographer as well as on the limits of spaces run under the banner of "no structure." I will expound a bit more on it in the conclusion but also think it may be worthwhile to develop it further in an article.

<sup>2</sup> I am explicitly not interested in the truth value of this claim, but use it as a way of indexing what for new activists was vital in their formation as activists. As such this generalization wouldn't hold for all *huelguistas* as it would for the youngest and newest members of the collective.



direct confrontation with the police and the occupation of the school by officers limited the range of ways to protest, excluding to a large extent that very openness and dynamism implicit in activist projects. One of the artists who was very active in *sembrando consciencia* “spreading consciousness”—a body painting collective that appeared in many protests that I discuss in more detail below—even described the first strike as the “more bloody and more radical” while the second strike was “lighter” or “softer” when in actuality there were more repressive conditions in the later one.<sup>3</sup>

Taken metaphorically and less literally however, it seems that the characterization of the first strike as more radical in terms of having space for artistic expression, in feeling more open to make criticisms that had violent implications. Considered in terms of the convergence between art and resistance which distinguished the first strike created the sense that it was more visceral, alive and potent as a struggle than later or earlier ones had been for participants.

One of my key interests in this chapter is to establish why the student strike of 2010 was both experienced as and remembered as the most radical struggle in recent history. Part of my claim relates to the larger intervention that I make in this dissertation that is as a temporary space, the 2010 UPR strike became a central node in a resistance project against Fortuño and his austerity policies. That is to say, the openness and experimental dynamics created by temporarily occupying the campus allowed for an explosion of artistic expression, by students and allies alike which activated a sense of

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<sup>3</sup> I draw these observations from artists, new students to the movement and the public generally. It is interesting to note students who held stricter socialist ideology felt that the opposite was true: the creativity of the strike led people to say that it was “huelga light” so they tended to emphasize the radical break and militancy of the first moments when the campus was taken over more than the do the magical and creative feeling of the mundane day-to-day.

revolutionary time. Artistic interventions were an essential aspect of the strike's radically generative power and were successful as consciousness raising projects because they were profoundly dialogical. They served as a playful demand for opening the lines of communication in a whole array of directions, creating an unbounded vision of resistance and of the future.

Calling artistic interventions consciousness-raising tools may seem at first glance to be a contradiction in terms because of the unclear directives and messages of an artistic intervention. Whether one holds a march, organizes a picket, distributes informative bulletins, or invites the media to a press conference, activists' main goal is to shift the perception of the uninitiated "masses" to awaken their consciousness or at the very least, to inform those who are uninformed about what is going on. As such, consciousness raising initiatives are ideally meant to create a permanent shift in ideological orientation of the viewer. Although it is true that the ideas presented through activism did definitely seek to shift the point of view of the observer, they were not presented in a linear or formulaic manner. Instead, they consisted in a play with ideas (*vacilar con las ideas*) that pointed to alternative constructions. As such, activist performances did produce an oppositional consciousness and draw allies to the movement.

In what follows, I think with Jacques Rancière in order to understand how the act of "putting the body where the words are" manifests itself vis-à-vis the question of activism and its role in promoting revolutionary time. As Rancière argues in terms of the relationship between art and politics in general, art unravels the facile valorization of consensus that dominates our sense of ethically correct and even, desired mode of

political engagement (2010). By positing that dissensus is the essential vehicle of social change, Rancière offers much useful insight into why a non-hierarchical organizational structure like participatory democracy could accommodate, and indeed needed activist interventions to thrive. As I will show, in distinction to traditional modes of consciousness-raising, activism served as an avenue for proliferating interpretations of the crisis, serving as a complement to and a safety valve from the sometimes suffocating consensus based model of participatory democracy. Here I should underscore that although a one hundred percent consensus did not need to be reached to achieve the goals for broad-based participation, activists always exclaimed with delight when a consensus was achieved. This emotional response suggests that striker-activists understood consensus to be the highest indicator that participatory democracy had been enacted.

In contrast to the model of consensus and acceptance of the claim to the inherent goodness of agreement, activist interventions worked by generating a discomforting dissonance, what Rancière describes as “tear[ing] the body from the scene of normalcy” (2010:1). Activism unfixed the boundaries between the public and activists, finding ways of reaching people who might automatically shut down when they hear another person yelling over a megaphone. *Ah ya, más política*. (Oh enough, more politics). Becoming unfixed, the viewer is able to leave a cognitive gap, or opening where once there was only rejection.

In this chapter, I aim to show how these activities that I call “activism” work to destabilize or unfix assumptions of viewers. I mobilize three different strategies to develop the topic and, as such, divide the chapter into three parts. I begin with a

processual unfolding of actions that I witnessed at Que Vivan los Estudiantes (long live the students) a day-long concert and celebration held outside the gates after the students' had occupied the campus for one week. To my mind, this day served as an exemplary day of creative expression—as the street itself became a stage for activists and allies alike to comment on the student strike, the police presence and the crisis of the country writ large.<sup>4</sup> I try to communicate some of that affective energy in the narrative construction itself. Next, I focus on a series of strategies that students employed frequently which were important for re-signifying protest space. By way of conclusion, I discuss my visit to smARTaction: a estudiar y a luchar (to study and struggle)—an exhibit collaboration which ran from October 3- November 29, 2011 in Hostos Community College in the South Bronx.<sup>5</sup> In bringing together artwork from the strike and pieces inspired by the strike, the exhibit temporarily encapsulated series of circulating images of key performances of the strike. In this section, I will underscore how time between the two strikes was collapsed by organizing the exhibit in such a way that two strikes' were mixed up together, placing disparate moments alongside one another. I'm interested in what this temporal mix up might tell us about the utility of activism as a strategy of lucha that serves as a thread connecting disparate moments, places and actors.

As should be clear, I believe that most of the beauty of activism is that it exceeds any one interpretation. Indeed, most activists refused to interpret their own work,

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<sup>4</sup>A few of my interlocutors disagreed with my interpretation of the concert as a great display of the artistic spirit of the strike, in part because internally, there was disagreement about the idea of holding a concert to raise funds for the strike. Regardless of internal debates, it is important to underscore that the concert was the first moment that I realized how important art was to this struggle to express an undefined alternative future to Fortuño's neoliberal policies. As one of the first public events, I believe that the concert did shape public perception of it as a protest distinguished by participants' levels of creativity.

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to Appendix B for the catalogue of the exhibit.

arguing that the outcome was totally uncertain and there was no apparent way to judge what spectators received from their activist interventions. So while I do use activist interventions as a point of entry to further demonstrate why ephemeral resistance practices are powerful forums for making broad critiques and refusals, I am not interested in analyzing them per se. Instead, I am interested in why activist "art" or "poetics" is an invitation to build routes to justice in fundamentally unjust and suffocating conditions. In part, this strength seems to have come from the fact that activism lies outside the strictures of political liberalism and the law. In the next chapter, we will return to the law and its relationship to justice. I recognize on some level, this to be a practical concern a way of thinking through a panorama of state responses to activism.

***Que Vivan Los Estudiantes: The Strike Presents itself to el Pueblo***

I wasn't around when the idea was approved in a plenary session. After arriving on the first day and becoming so taken away by the feeling that something historic was happening, I decided to stay overnight. A friend that I had met in campa got me some space in a friend's tent where we slept on the concrete outside the rotunda in education. There were no sheets, or mats to make it more comfortable and the hardness of the ground had the effect of magnifying how different it was to occupy a non-residential space, how many comforts I have in my home. *These feelings were muted at campa which had, after so many years of occupation become something between the public and private domains—a comfortable camping trip.* When I woke up, that sense of disorientation continued to pulse through me after I decide to get up and come home.

I stayed away physically for a few days but followed the unfolding from all the newspapers, radio stations and online opinion pieces I could get my hands on. I didn't come back right away because I wasn't sure why I was there in the first place. *Rosaly describes her frustration with the intoxication factor of the strike. Describing how so many students voted "yes" without really understanding it intellectually, or "through reason" as she put it, I think of my own (similar) attraction to the palpable electric energy which were so potent all day even when the avenue was only sparsely populated.*

As the first major event organized for the public by the student movement, *que vivan los estudiantes* (long live the students) was promoted as a space for allies to come show solidarity for the movement through participating in an artistic act(ion).

Promoting the event took on a quality that was equal parts invitation and invocation.

This quality was apparent for example, in this excerpt from a Facebook event for the concert:

...now is the time for solidarity to be made concrete through artistic acts so that art may serve as a sounding board for the students' demands that in turn serve as a sounding board of the discontent that the people have for this abusive government. (my translation)

(El apoyo que se ha demostrado en estos primeros días de lucha estudiantil ha sido muy cálido pero es momento que la solidaridad se concretize en un acto artístico donde el arte sirva como caja de resonancia para los reclamos estudiantiles que su vez son caja de resonancia para el descontento que tiene el pueblo frente a este gobierno abusador.)

By using the metaphor of the "sounding board," students' invitation to artistically stage and decry levels of corruption, experiences of austerity and repression disrupted the scene of politics. The invited were not just students but all actors frustrated by the crisis the country was facing. What came out of it was a radically distinct space/time that

created a sense of collective outrage and innumerable critiques. That is to say, it brought different people together, but the distinct interventions presented also disrupted any feelings of one-ness among those present forcing us to come to terms with a heterogeneity that was comforting and, at the same time, enraging. Activism is predicated on this act of echoing (and listening for the echoes) characteristic of the sounding board, which travels in dialogue across gaps of space and time. To see that what seem like breaks, resonate and go together in ways that have much more in common when you get used to the rhythm but attentive to unexpected anyway.

Compared to earlier and later days, rules for entering the campus were strict. Anyone who wanted to enter the campus needed a current student identification card. Not having a way in, I stood around awkwardly at first, until I gave my attention to the stage, which in the early hours was really the site that gave the space a rhythm. One performer follows another with different student emcees breaking in and offering some statement of their own interests fused with those of the collective. An array of local performers of various levels and niches of followings, they too break from their singing to offer praise to this group of strikers combined with anecdotes about their own relationship to the UPR system. I was surprised just how many of them had either studied at the Río Piedras campus or performed in the local scene around its gates. *Others more familiar with the institution's history would expect such a connection, I'm sure.*

When students grabbed the microphone, donning the *que vivan* t-shirt: plain white with black lettering and spoke with such vigor and passion, I feel goose bumps spread across my body and I think of what it would be like to be able to communicate to

others in such profoundly sharp improvised comments. Listening to them created a wave of emotion in me, as I stood in the streets mesmerized by the stage. Xiomara's speech was one of the only ones I thought to write down. *After I met her and learned of her background in Public Relations I realize that it's because her message was both improvised but directed in such a way by her training on the production and dissemination of one's image.* She affirmed the changes already made by the students highlighting their efforts to build a new university, one that cared about the environment, and one where consciousness wouldn't be a mere abstraction, expressed in the classroom but also would be something to create in practice through actions that *huelguistas* were realizing through their occupation. Refrains that became more indexical over time, rang for me that day with a vibrancy and immediate clarity I hadn't felt before. *We are not a minority! If this is the minority, where is the majority? Education is a right not a privilege!*

Clarity came sharp and fast for me when a professor and his daughter, both in the drama department, read the strike's "letter to the country" to the spectators in solidarity. I found out later the letter was the result of a proposal to craft a collaborative letter to the country. It was passed around during the night before the concert as different members added and edited the statement. It was unlike the later moments of press releases and official statements, prepared videos of the national negotiating committee speaking to the community at large because its message was not a pragmatic reporting, but a statement about the ideas of the movement. Indeed, the letter was a reflection of the movement's principles, drafted through a practice of collaborative communication. As Rosaly explained it to me, "the letter was a way to intervene in the



discourse and representation of the university strike to the media. We wanted to show that our ideas were valiant and to speak for ourselves.” As such, in addition to the reading itself, students made 300 copies and gave them out to folks at the event. A version of the letter was also published in all of the island’s major newspapers.<sup>6</sup>

Surprising too, though were the things that happened in the streets. As responses to the students’ invitation for allies to show their solidarity by offering their own artistic act(ion)s, many participants brought an idea from another movement, another space/time. These participants, both members of the student body and those from the larger community, used the event to further develop burgeoning criticisms of government corruption, and repression by playing with ideas, twisting them to create a resonance between then and now, here and there as much as now/here and then/there.<sup>7</sup>

Like Zchizchi’s solo performance. She walked through the streets with a giant sign on her back that read: *estamos limpiando el sucio político con jabón artístico a la sociedad con burbujas de fe al ser con una revolución interna.* (We are cleaning society’s political filth away with artistic soap creating bubbles of faith to becoming through an internal revolution.) Thinking of Toni Cade Bambara and all the women of color feminists I love, I followed her across the street, intrigued by her broom made of paper maiche, topped by a crystal ball. *Later, when I interviewed her, she told me that she actually created the broom for a class on paper sculptures. “I didn’t get a really*

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B to read the full letter.

<sup>7</sup> In this paragraph, I am invoking the idea of the palimpsest, a term which literally refers to a piece of paper that has been written on and imperfectly erased, such that the past remains present even as new words and memories are written over it. It has been best developed by Jacqui Alexander in her 2006 *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*. In this volume of collected pieces by Alexander, she uses the palimpsest to criticize a colonial distinction between the “here and now” as modern, and the “then and there” as traditional. I use it here to suggest that activists too move through past and present, taking their tools and reshaping them while remaining cognizant of their old uses.

*good grade on the assignment, but when the call was made, I just knew it was perfect for this moment.” The only new piece was the sign she carried on her back. As she walked, she engaged in a play with her spectators, who happily involved themselves in her play.*

“We need so much cleansing” she yelled! “Oh my God, it’s time to cleanse this society of corruption!” Some of her audience responded in kind, calling to her. “Yes! Over here! Over here!! Shuffling along while she sweeps she thanks them, “Good people!” Dialogic encounter par excellence, Zchizch’s spiritual-political cleansing was an artistic act(ion) that sought to heal the community from corruption. As she described it to me, “I wanted to heal my society from the feeling of impotence at not being able to do anything about the crisis that we are living through.” By inviting spectators to engage in a familiar ritual of the spiritual cleansing at a concert/festival celebrating student’s lucha, her interpretation was that we could make a new society by making internal shifts. In so doing, she disrupted a facile separation between healing and social justice activists sometimes uphold.

Like this solo enactment of spiritual-political cleansing, the performance troupe, La Unidad de Operaciones Tácticas de los Payasos de la Policía (The Tactical Operations Unit of the Police Clowns’). As Israel Lugo, a local well known artist and one of the founders of the event explained on “Piedra, Papel y Tijera” (Rock paper scissors) a radio show broadcast on Radio Universidad: *los payasos policía* was first conceptualized as an improvisational protest against a new ordinance that was passed which forced all establishments in the Old San Juan area to close by 2am for *Las*

*Fiestas de San Sebastian.*<sup>8</sup> The inspiration was reportedly a cover page of *el Nuevo Día* which had an image of police in riot gear and a title which read, “police sweep the streets.” As such, the name of the performance troupe is a very loosely adapted official name for the Riot Police.

They thought that the concert would be an ideal platform to continue to criticize what they understood to be useless deployments of police officers. *For all the times that politicians like to throw statistics around for the high criminality in Puerto Rico, an overload of officers were sent to work the student strike. Many who were dispatched to work at the university did not even work in the San Juan metropolitan area, leaving the island without any police presence at all.* When the clown police arrive on the scene they line up directly in front of the officers, following a series of orders from their chief giving them signals for moving in formation *left, right, front back (not necessarily in that order)*. Using their brooms, these clown police “clean the perimeter” in order to keep it open for the flow of traffic. Although the image of keeping a space open evokes the force of the law, the protestors were resolutely against violence and invested in humanizing police officers who were deployed to work there while underscoring the absurdity of the order to repress a nonviolent protest. While the clown police made spectators experience a break from the tension, the imminent violence suggested by the official police presence. Although riot police rarely break form, I noticed their interest in these clowns as their eyes shifting slightly toward the performers. Some even had a slight almost imperceptible smirk on their face.

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<sup>8</sup> *Las fiestas* is an extremely popular street festival held for four consecutive days in the old city to mark the end of the Christmas season.

Paper mache was a common tool. Wielded not just by Zchizchi's individual performance or the well-known performance troupe Papel Machete, who had returned to their own alma mater to hold a collaborative paper mache workshop, building the iconic student puppet *el estudiante militante* (the militant student) who required at least four people to manage it. He was distinguished by his iconic UPR *no se vende t-shirt* (UPR is not for sale).



**FIGURE 2:** *El Estudiante militante*, Papel Machete

He was first unveiled at the concert and he continues to tour the world, having last stopped in NYC for the smARTaction exhibit that I describe in the conclusion of this chapter.

There was also the group of young mourning women-skeletons whose presence heralded the death of the university. As they slowly walked down the avenue in all black—they pushed along a huge skull made of paper mache. As they moved, they

seemed to exist in a synchronized grieving, each one seeming more alone than the next despite their proximity to each other and to others on the street. I was impressed by the dimensions of the skull and thought it could be huge enough to be the very skull of the university. The skull's paper wasn't just any paper—as I examined it closely, I found that it was made of classic books—poems, nationalist literature, fiction—an even more powerful way to denote the death of the university that the books which once were the topic of classroom debates and final papers were used in the service of building a skull, a dead head useless and on its way to a burial site. Or was it? There was a resolutely spiritual force of enacting the death of the university, especially as the artistic act(ion)s of the day declared through all their brilliance suggested the exact opposite.

I was surprised at how those policies that were explicitly meant to destroy the very conditions for creativity to flourish had ironically brought that very creativity alive. As one interlocutor explained the potent power of activism to me, “*en momentos de crisis, el teatro florece*” (in moments of crisis, theater flourishes). The performative interventions caused spectators to consider the university's death in more expansive terms, not just in terms of material ones. In this way, death promoted life: and was an entry to making claims about the ethical imperative of humanistic education. Since the theater itself is play, the best action for making one's humanistic capacity explode, it can posit alternatives at the very moment the darkness of crisis envelops us. As María's brief but incisive comment indicates, in moments of crisis imagined alternatives dance up and across our imaginations, inciting us to recall the capacity for change that exists within each of us.

The trope of the death of the university would reappear again and again was clearly a comment on the death of a particular kind of university. Not just the impending death caused by the financial crisis, and the cuts made by the governor. But also and perhaps even more importantly, the death of a humanistic university: one that questions the acts of the dominant, that teaches critical thinking and that asks students to read other people's texts in a way where their own attitudes and concerns are temporarily suspended so that they can fully enter the world of the author on his/her own terms.

Through continual engagement with activism, that distinguishing aspect of *la huelga creative*, I came to see that such actions were so powerful because they refused the terms of silencing, frustration (and even, death) that austerity proposes. In refusing to be silenced, activist actions also softened the boundaries of protest in two primary ways: in highlighting art in the framing and naming of their actions and by destabilizing the separation between the resistance and the outside world and oppositions implied therein. I argue that these efforts to re-signify protest space was among the most subtle strategies of consciousness raising students achieved. It was also one way that artwork and traditional modes of consciousness raising were conjoined as the primary discursive claim was that UPR was a country (a more beautiful one perhaps, but one who faced the same crisis as the island itself). Rosaly's sense of the benefits of activism lies in its potential for eliminating negative habits of being with ourselves and others. She explained, "The point of activism is to break with the normal and known." Instead of giving in to the feeling of shutting down, activism asks you to embrace the abnormal and open up to something unknown.

(Arte): *Claim your Space*

As I have shown in earlier parts of this chapter, activist interventions were an important part of the way that activists engaged in protest during the student strike. Even the preamble to the strike was artistically inflected. A performance taken by Mikey in the humanities school assembly was instrumental in securing a vote for their 24 hour stoppage. After hours of debating, neither side (for or against) had gained much ground. Then, Mikey stands up and interrupts the proceeding. Waving a marker around him, he spoke loudly *compañeros sin pañeros* until the room went silent and the one taking his turn stopped speaking. He approached two of the students in the audience and wrote on their arms: *basta ya de palabras* (enough words) and tuning to his own body wrote *huelga ya* (strike already). A cry erupted and the strike was approved. By mobilizing performance to launch his critique, the body became the discursive terrain of his protest. By writing strike on the skin he took the material body and turned it into a discursive tool that expressed a desire that prepared others to join in. In many ways, this prelude marked the significance of the artistic interventions, which sought to put the body where the words are.

The double presence of art as a very mode of carrying out protest actions as well as in the discourse of the actions was key throughout the first strike. The humanities occupation which Mikey's performance advocated for was named ocup(arte). Ocupar is the verb for to occupy and by adding the pronoun of you to it, becomes command like, to occupy yourself: get busy. It shifts the attention to the local level, the community of *huelguistas* and all those who wanted to be engaged in prefigurative

political action with them. At the same time, in bracketing art in the title of the event, the naming calls the viewer's attention to the fact that art lives within the logic of occupation and on a practical level, emphasizes the artistic dimension of any given protest or activity. There were many versions of this strategy repeated over the course of the strike: for example, *Ocup(arte)*, *Transform(arte)*, *Restaur(arte)*, and *Contiag(arte)* (occupy, transform, restore, contact)—pointing to the popularity of the tactic.

When *ocup(arte)* was held on April 12, 2010 it consisted in “shutting down” the classroom spaces before it was in use by flipping desks, and scribbling *ocup(arte)* on the board. Then, moving outside the students focused their activities on the green space and common area between the different buildings which were tied to the Humanities division of the school.



(picture courtesy of Isamar Abreu, April 12, 2010)

### **FIGURE 3: Flipped Desks: *Ocup(arte)***

Without any description, this single word on the blackboard left any student who showed up to school to figure out for themselves what might be going on. It reminded



professors of the letter that they had received from the students asking them to join in the protest and not hold classes in the building, instead inviting them to the quad where the stoppage was to be held.

Activities throughout the day were mixed, and consisted in painting benches as if they were protest signs and in one case turning the seat into a grassy knoll. They also included various performances and poetry readings in addition to impressive installations, all aimed at rousing the interest of a viewer in learning more about what might be inspiring such actions. In the following image, there is a beautiful installation done by Rosaly Mota Márquez, which loosely translates to “don’t fall for the trap of the administration.” El pescau (pescado) would be most analogous in this case to the red herring and as one could see it is dead, just a skeleton, alluding to the fact that in so doing (falling for the trap) one would be left without recourse to flourish, to live.



(photo courtesy of Rosaly Mota Marquez; installation by Rosaly Mota Marquez)

**FIGURE 4:** *No caigas en el pesau*, installation



(photos courtesy of Isamar Abreu)

### FIGURE 5: Mimes speak

The two mimes above are wearing signs that read (from right to left): “your indifference makes you an accomplice” and “I want to graduate from a public university” refer to larger issues. In the latter, that the university may cease to be a public institution or become so expensive that it would be impossible to graduate. In the former, the performer with a clown nose and a mouth covered by black tape pokes fun at those who do think that by not participating they are remaining neutral.

Ocup(arte) set the stage for what would become a powerful and literally contagious creative strike. For Rancière, the specific power of art lies in its ability to suspend one’s feeling of being in normal time and in reorienting one’s general perceptual space as well as disrupting forms of belonging. As he explains at the very outset of his text, “genuine political or artistic activities always involve forms of innovation that tear bodies from their assigned places and free speech and expression from all reduction and functionality” (2010:1). Thus, in highlighting the artistic dimensions of what might usually be categorized as “protest” activities, they were able

to shift the sense that these were yet more of the same politics that should be ignored as others had been in the past.

Once the strike was approved, activism spread across the school into other divisions. One of the most important activities was an open mic session held at the porous boundary that the Barbosa gate represented as it was the only open gate subject to the most interaction with the outside, both police and members of the university research community external to the strike. As a nightly activity, the open mic started sometime in the first weeks and lasted until the string of special tactic of unit that used to keep guard in front of the access were asked to retire from their posts in late July. As Rebollo, one of the principal organizers of the event explained, the open mics served as one way to safely comment on the line between the strike and the outside, to talk back to the officers indirectly. “It gave us the opportunity to contest the legitimacy of them being there without necessarily getting immersed in a violent encounter.” This quickly became necessary as the proximity to officers produced a tension and discomfort that anticipated officers’ response to students. *You almost got to know one another. Sometimes we’d engage in small talk and things would feel as casual and mundane as one would have with a stranger on the street. We’d talk about the weather or about a sports game and you’d start to wonder if they were really so bad. But quickly and without clear cause, these same officers would return back into the aggressive posture.* As Rebollo explained, “they would suddenly threaten violence. That they couldn’t wait to receive the order and would exclaim their desire to hit us with their batons.”

Using the equipment of la UTIER who was stationed immediately outside this gate of the university, they connected to the *tumba coco*<sup>9</sup> (speaker system) and began to sing and read poetry from published and personal works. The sound reverberated all around Río Piedras community and people would come from outside and act as both audience and participants.

The event did serve to reclaim or re-signify protest space but it also importantly made art a vehicle for resistance. The difference between these moments and large scale manifestations was that it provided a forum for folks to amplify their own voices and ideas in an intimate way, without placing their bodies at risk. Here reading other pieces written for other moments became a sensuous way of linking frustrations and going beyond them. Rebollo cited a peculiar aspect of the transmission of other meanings through reading potent protest pieces and listening to protest songs:

I grew up listening to nationalist songs—these songs didn't mean much to me while drinking and playing dominos and then all of a sudden you hear these songs differently, they come to mean something else. The songs all of a sudden meant something else, they became real in a way. To this day particular poems also mean something more to me because of that experience. And don't think that is a unique experience. At least from the conversations I had after that.

By vocalizing with prior moments of resistance in the strike encampment, the messages become more real, attached to the feeling of the moment they were living. That is to say, these words no longer signal a tradition of listening to something just because its tradition but are imbued with a radical possibility. Instead, while listening to these words, they realized it reflected something of their experience here in this moment. It's

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<sup>9</sup>Tumba coco is a colloquial name for a large speaker system, outfitted to a van or truck usually. The sound is so loud it could knock down coconuts from the tree.

the staging of this open mic, and the context and the reason that they are there that suddenly becomes more palpable in the present.

In this way, the open mic gave the participants pleasure and released some of the tension they felt in this area. They were no longer watched by the officers in a way that they couldn't control. Resignifying the space became consonant by students ability to take control over what the officers were watching, making them subject to viewing what they may not normally be comfortable with or even enjoy. They took the intimacy of the space—the very intimacy that created tension in other moments, and used it to displace their own tension onto the officers.

In contrast to large scale protest, these poetry readings were never reported on by the media. As such, I argue that they were not performances for the media but rather a way of reversing the power imbalance between the police and the students. In other contexts the police were always empowered with the threat of action, the possibility of their acting at any time made them powerful spectators. Whereas while watching the open mic they were transformed into a spectator-witness instead of as a spect-actor. The reversal took away the power embedded in it in their usual postures.

### ***Embodying the Crisis through the Tropes of Nature and Death***

In this section, I am interested in the examining certain key tropes that were used to resignify protest space during the first strike. As Fernando wrote in the introduction of the now classic collected volume *Beyond Metaphor*, studies of figurative devices in everyday life, is "...focused more on the entirety of the tropes in dynamic relation as a congeries of figures and performative possibilities than upon a sole, so-

called master trope of metaphor” (1991: 7). To call certain repeating images and tactics tropes, I mean to allude to the playful and poetic nature of their appearance. The practical concerns of *huelguistas* to call attention to their *lucha* and get the administration to sit down and dialogue with them was an inspiration for the development of poetic perspectives of the crisis that were embodied in actions that were meant to be evocative. Since the administration refused to engage with students, it gave them an opportunity to craft critiques of the current state of affairs in a polemical and disruptive manner.

Although some of these strategies were recycled for the second strike, I’m interested in how the campus itself and the boundaries between the campus and the outside world were effaced or at least, softened through student activist interventions. I am conceptualizing boundaries in two ways: the literal boundary of the protest space marked by the barricades that students built inside the gates and by the ring of police surrounding the campus on the other side of the gates and also in terms of the boundary between protesters and non-protestors. Two keys to this boundary breaking work were the fragility of the natural world and the figure of death.

### ***Flowers at the Picket Line*<sup>10</sup>**

While students occupied the Río Piedras campus, they had to confront the public constantly. For example, every morning, a picket was held at the Portón de la Barbosa known as the security gate. Most strikers would be awoken to a (no so gentle) reminder

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, protestors wielding flowers at a protest was first popularized during the 1960s when activists against the Vietnam War mobilized it. It quickly became a way to protest unjust acts of violence as in the Kenn State shootings in Ohio University in 1970. The image of a protestor hurling flowers has remained a popular one, most recently made iconic by Banksy, a U.K. based street artist.

over the megaphone to get up and make their way over to the security gate to join the picket line. Here there was always interaction with officers and non-affiliates with the strike—some of whom did not approve of the strike, or at least expressly displayed frustration for students' requirements that all researchers show identification and be on a registry in order to successfully enter the campus.

One way that students responded at first to this tense border was to offer flowers to officers as they stood in a line facing the riot police, chanting on most days, but sometimes just standing in silence. They served as an offering to supplement the pleas for dialogue but the strategy of mobilizing flowers in a strike is not a new one in Puerto Rico. In fact, the photo essay of the UPR strike in 1981 published as a part of *Huelga y Sociedad: Analisis de los sucesos en la U.P.R. 1981-1982* also includes an image of a protestor with flowers.<sup>11</sup> Although in this earlier case, the image is of a single woman holding a bunch of flowers approaching an officer inside the university. In the image, she is turned back toward the camera and her face is looking away from the officer. She appears timid and is unclear whether she will offer one flower to the officer or the whole bunch but her attitude is very different from the images of students facing officers at the picket line.

Flowers are not what one expects to be hurled at the officers dispatched to the university as if awaiting an order to break form and begin the arrests, to begin the beatings, etc. If we look closely, though we can see that the faces are not always peaceful—that the chants were also sung aggressively, that the flowers themselves could be wielded as weapons.

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<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the photo montage at the end of the book does not include page numbers, but the image I describe above is in the section titled October 1981, seventeen pages in.



(Photograph generated via Google online search: *Primera Hora, Huelga Day 22*)

### **FIGURE 6: An Aggressive Offering**

Recalling Pablo Neruda's oft-cited line, *podrán cortar todas las flores, pero no podrán detener la primavera*, (You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming.) this tactic suggested that nonviolent protest was more potent than the violent tools used to repress it. That regardless of what aggression the state took to silence their protest, the change they were advocating would still come. In the below image, Rebollo offers a discourse to the officers as students stand in silence. The tone of the image is decidedly somber.





(Photo courtesy of Gamelyn Oduardo Sierra)

**FIGURE 7: Rebollo talks to officers**

Clearly such a move was a way of visually magnifying the different positions of the two sides, what Rancière divides into *la politique* and *la police*. Whereas *la politique* might be translated as something akin to “pure” politics—a politics that challenges the state and all established orders, it is much more complicated as a term (see for example, Chamber 2011). *La police* too stands in for more than the police or the state. Instead, for Rancière, it encapsulates what we normally understand to be the political terrain: the state, governing bodies, the courts, etc. The opposition between the two still holds if one considers the aesthetic dimensions embedded within Rancière’s critique of the political terrain, it becomes clear that the two positions of the uniformed police and flower wielding students, offer potent oppositions vis-à-vis the established order and of the futures proposed: one of increased militancy, of hardness that portends violence in

its preparation for it and another of beauty, and fragility. Even though these images are well known and perhaps, even rehearsed, the offering of flowers at the picket line still exceeds our interpretative capacity—certain as they are to fail to prevent violence and repression.

These dichotomies become profoundly palpable after students released their flowers to the ground.



(photo courtesy of Gamelyn Oduardo Sierra)

**FIGURE 8: Flowers vs. Boots**

After the protest line has been broken, the officers black boots appear tall next to the protestors discarded flowers; lying on the ground they symbolize an offering of emancipation rejected.

The images of the discarded flower and of the flowering offering create two different temporal sensations. In the hand, they create a pause—a maybe. On the ground, they signal a failure but still imbued with a vibrant beauty that shines just before death. As cut flowers on the ground, we know that they will soon be trampled and become a metaphor the students themselves and their pleas for dialogue now.

Like the other practices described in this section, throwing or holding flowers at the picket line not only shifted public understandings of what student-strikers offered to the movement, it also used artistic actions as the way for delineating protest space even as it complicated what should be included in that space. These strategies also helped to spread the idea that the strike was a creative refusal to accept the conditions of crisis. A simple gesture of beauty in the face of repressive conditions, flowers signaled student-activists refusal to become apathetic even when they were being ignored by the administration. As such, activist interventions created an oppositional narrative that implicated spectators from the public at large in their struggle, aligning the beautiful and the nonviolent with their protest.

### ***Staging the Ethico-Political Future: The Death of the Public University***

As I alluded in to in the narrative section on the student concert, the trope of the death of the university was a very popular one—used for multiple performances over the course of both strikes. It even served as inspiration for an obituary of the university written by Antonio Martorell, an artist in residence at Cayey campus of the UPR during the second strike. Of course, it bears mention that it wasn't until the second strike that the trope of the dying university became more than proposition. In the moments after

the campus was occupied by the police so that students could not again hold a strike as potent as they had in April 2010, a cursory view of the campus in winter made it clear that the university had changed. Beyond the 10,000 who could no longer afford to study after the institution of the \$800 quota, officers had taken the place of students, literally occupying the campus after the second stoppage was lifted on December 9, 2010. A handful of students that I knew personally who were active in the first strike, dropped out. As they explained it to me, they were so uncomfortable with the perpetual police presence that they could not focus on their studies with some many officers in it. To be in mourning became a reality for students, faculty and staff alike. Instead of a meeting place for the slow and fluid exchange of ideas, one found officers eating in the snack shacks (merenderos), sitting on the benches and leisurely walking around the campus. For all that people were bothered by the student strike and for all the controversy it generated, there was nothing like feeling like entering campus was entering an occupied terrain (in the worst sense of the term). *Fearing checkpoints and being stopped to be asked for identification at any point, and at the discretion of the police. I always spoke in English in these moments and used my Cornell student identification if prompted to show some evidence I was a student. As I prepared to enter the campus, I would repeat performances in my head, visualizing myself “playing dumb.” I’m on my way to the library to do research. I’d say. Good thing they never asked on what.*

Caveats aside, in this section, I am interested in how mobilizing the trope of the death of the university re-signified protest space, associating it with life, with growth and the death with the unchanged and uncontested policies of the administration. The



skeletons so frequently used, I remember some artists becoming exasperated. *¿Diache más esqueletos?* (Damn, more skeletons?) Two characteristic images of skeleton performers are provided below:



("Death to the Dictatorship" photo courtesy of Sembrando Consciencia.)

**FIGURE 9: *Waiting for the Death***



(photo courtesy of Sembrando Consciencia)

**FIGURE 10:** *Skeleton on the Move*

A few aspects are worth noting. What they share is the painted body and the serious expression of the performer. The above image was taken at a protest in the streets, away from the campus, and is meant to generate consciousness among the public about the strike, and to make the protest space more mobile, and its boundaries less narrow. The latter image, the skeleton is in motion, moving in front of officers directly in front of the main gates of the university. However, in both of these images, at least part of the critique is of those that order repression of the protestors' voices. In the former, the dictatorship is a clear reference to the Governor Luis Fortuño and the latter, a criticism of the officers whose presence causes free expression to die.

Given the sheer plethora of moments and meaning one could mine from skeletons presence in the protest activities, I will focus on one of the earliest protests, “de luto por el fallecimiento de la educación pública” a street theater performance enacted on May 4, 2010—in the still early period the first strike when negotiations had just begun. After describing the event that brought the mourning into being, I will discuss why body painting became so important to student protests. Throughout both narrative descriptions, my goal is to show how from a pedagogical perspective, enacting death was a sharp criticism that lucidly extrapolated the effects of economic restrictions and closures onto the student body, the imagination and by extension, the university itself.

The mourning performance was first and foremost, a response to an outburst by the riot police squad at the security gate located on la Avenida Barbosa (Barbosa Avenue) in the early morning during the picketing. According to eye witness reports, officers began pushing and hitting some students as they attempted to join the picket line. A few news reporters were hurt in the scuffle but no one was arrested. None of the authorities interviewed could speak with certainty about what caused the outburst and all denied that there was an order given to storm the gate. Tensions were high because the night before, students on the negotiating committee had given then President of the UPR system, José de la Torre their counter offer to his first negotiating offer. In response to this attack, which students and public thought to signal the lack of respect for the No-Confrontation policy, students enacted in a plethora of actions throughout the day. Among them, a sit-in in the clock tower while Ana Guadalupe interim rector of the Río Piedras campus, met with deans upstairs, the founding of strike garden which

discussed more in depth in chapter three as well as hanging white tape with the words dialogue and negotiation written on them on various gates of the campus.

When I happened upon the students preparing for the picketing at the president's office, they were already in performative mode as they stood absolutely still, clustered together in the small area with benches that surround the Betances statue. Although they were formally dressed as women from another time period, there was one male in the group, who towered over the others. There were many hands painting intently to get them ready. Since they couldn't really move, they reminded me of how a child looks when they are being face painted or getting makeup applied by an adult for some special occasion or simply for play. That same frozenness and the excitement was palpable here. Although I knew some of the artists who were there that day—from the public arts university *La Escuela de Artes Plásticas* (EAP)<sup>12</sup>—they were so focused that I could tell that no one had any time to talk—between those whose faces and bodies were still wet and those (mostly male) painters rushing to get them done so they could make it over to the protest in time to join the others.

It bears mention here that the artists from EAP were almost always responsible for the painted bodies at the public protests. Many of these artists were part of a collective called *sembrando consciencia* (spreading awareness) although the literal translation of planting consciousness gives a better sense of how the idea of the group was brought into being. One of the coordinators of collective, Antonio Sierra, a recent graduate of the EAP explained that the group first appeared in 2009 for an activity he

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<sup>12</sup> The students in EAP also founded a campsite to protest the massive budgetary cuts imposed by Law 7 at their institution. In 2011, they were assigned \$374,000 for an operating budget, what represents a cut of 89% from the 2009 budget. Although they were unsuccessful in paralyzing the institution, their encampment just outside the gates lasted over forty days.



helped to plan called “*sembrando el morro*” (planting the Morro fort) where a group of students did a photo shoot of bodies painted as trees in the over 400 year old, six-level fort, *Castillo de San Felipe del Morro*. The fort borders the entrance of the San Juan harbor and stands just across the green from EAP. The inspiration of this action was Toni’s research where he discovered that trees planted in the 1980s in the green space were declared illegal and ordered removed. As Toni explained to me, “I’m not an environmentalist but I’d rather see a tree than another concrete building.” His idea was to become trees through a body painting performance as a commentary on the lack of trees in and around el Morro.

From this history, it is easy to see that the motivating drive of *sembrando consciencia*’s interventions is to do performance that spreads consciousness through art. After completing his degree, Toni decided to continue to spread awareness through body painting at various marches and public protests but he was keen to eschew responsibility for the collective, a tool for calling artists to participate in a plethora of protests without any one person owning. Despite Toni’s eschewal of his identity as an environmentalist, there is something to be said for the way that nature becomes the vehicle for spreading awareness. We might even extend this metaphor to the study of street theater and activist interventions more broadly—the idea is to plant a seed, no emphasis or interest at all with what people do with it afterwards.

I stood around just watching the painters work for a good amount of time until they finally completed their work. And as the skeletons finally ran off, they pulled their black lace veils over from the back of their head to cover their faces. Dressed as cadavers, they created such a strange opposition, between those very alive humans

running off *in a rush* and those whose death has already made any such rush useless. At the march, the female skeletons accompanied the fe(male) imposing whole held in his hands a Spanish fan. Each of the mourners that accompanied him held a bunch of yellow daisies, which as Aura Colón Solá described it in her reporting of the day's events as "the last vestige of life which they offered to the police who mostly ignored their pleas" in the student collective press medium Rojo Gallito.



(photo courtesy of multitud enred(ada); Iván Chaar-López)

**FIGURE 11: *En luto***

An image published in *El Nuevo Día*, one officer appeared to be fighting back tears, visibly moved as he watched the women cry and mourn the death of the public university. The performance was a simple one. Although the skeletons did not speak, a group of girls sat on the ground and cried hysterically. One girl grips the bunch of yellow daisies as if searching for comfort as they grieved. For the majority of the time the skeletons stood with their backs to the officers, engaging the audience of students who stood quietly watching them.



(Photo courtesy of Yarelys Rivera Rodríguez).

**FIGURE 12:** *El dolor que la muerte se llevó*, Y. Rivera Rodríguez

One of the skeletons also offered her bouquet to the officers who as in other moments en la Barbosa, ignored her offering as best they could. As one of the performers—Camila—a student of theater herself said, "Queríamos un poco dramatizar la muerte de la dignidad y el respeto" (we wanted to dramatize the death of dignity and respect) that the officers so it violated by pushing and injuring some at the picket line in the early morning hours. After the performance was complete, the skeleton performers laid on the ground in a line directly in front of the officers on the floor, barefoot. No small feat on any city street, they were metaphorically exposed to the officers as well as the elements.

The reason this activism was so impressive to the media was because the “silent majority,” a group opposed to the student strike who “just wanted to study,” actually joined the picket line with the student-strikers. Five members of this group including their leader Eduardo Nater also came to el Jardín Botánico (botanical gardens)—at first because they wanted to speak to the President of the University against the strikers. When they too found that they could not enter the presidency, blocked by the police irrespective of their position on the protests, they were convinced by Student Trustee, Rene Vargas, to join the protest. Given that neither they could enter the grounds, blocked by the officers, they joined in the picket because although they did not necessarily agree with the strike, they too were silenced and ignored just as much as the student protesters. Vargas invited him and his party to join the demonstration which at this point was a picket to protest the refusal of the Board of Trustees to meet with students. Escorted by one of the ladies in black and a margarita, Nater joined the picket and chanting agreed to meet with the Negotiating Committee. According to reports on

Rojo Gallito, Nater was quoted as saying, "We understand that there is a willingness of the administration to negotiate and this is what we want. Our demands are the same." In joining the march, they contributed to the public perception that the silent majority was opposed to the closure of the institution and not necessarily of the student strike.

But it seems to me that the performance itself crystallized a much stronger criticism than a temporary truce between opposing factions of the student body—resolutely divided on the legitimacy of students as strikers. In this performance, it is clear that not only the university but also the students are themselves dead. That they are being murdered by these new polices, that make accessibility and excellence every day more a dream, a fleeting fantasy of the past. I asked various artists why the trope of death—why the skeletons? I got answers as varied as wanting people to recognize that there were deaths (t)here as much as in other places; we want to have fun with death, a praise song to the resistance; something has to happen [change] even if we die. As a visual movement, activists demonstrated that we live in a world where death is normal. And we want that to be strange—which it must be as a as a visual critique. Creating a striking resonance with protests in the Arab World, which became known as the “Arab Spring” in the United States, but in a local context was known as the “Dignity Uprising.” This move of maybe not having dignity, (or being denied it) as channeled through acts of resistance, even if the end result is death.

*When the free expression of performance was closed  
Locked in an area flanking government printed banners: Area of Public Expression  
they continued to play.  
Becoming more clandestine each time.  
They learn to move quickly.  
So fleeting were the openings all one could hope for to be noticed, declare victory and  
then disappear.*

*These uprisings too grew weak as the window before attacks by officers became smaller and smaller.*

Students looked after and cared for each other within and in spite of their (our) vulnerability in the face of police violence, arrests and the like. Like the day students were trapped inside plaza universitario. Indymedia's powerful DVD *Huelga en la UPR* that includes a collection of shorts made at different protests during the second strike, remind us of these moments that media erases of a student senselessly beaten by a group of officers as students throw their bodies over his and others grab on a book bag, jerking the student back so he doesn't get pulled into another scene like it.

Other forms of protest become more relevant like graffiti and stencils that left security cameras in the bathrooms and invited viewers to engage with the ongoing repression. Also they came to life in notebooks. Poetry, culture jamming and blog posts itself channeled that resolute impulse of refusing silence and the trap of drowning in one's own fears.

But it was the writing after that carried that sense of revolutionary time despite it all. As the editor of the literary magazine *el sótano* put it in her introductory words of the special issue *edición pasquín*<sup>13</sup> dedicated to the student strike, "Se trata, a fin de cuentas, de conjugar la palabra (hablada o escrita) con la 'energía del acto'" (it [the goal] after all, to combine the word with the energy of the act." These written elegies to student struggle which while waning in terms of the power it once wielded in the first

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<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, a pasquín refers to an anonymous piece of writing, typically displayed in a public place set with satirical expressions against a government or particular person in power. It also refers more colloquially in Puerto Rico to a poster or political flyer.

strike (at least in terms of the public eye) still sustained an energy of the act of resistance, although now disperse.

In the moments after the openness was closed by the police occupation and the radical repression by administration and police of free expression, many activists and allies turned to poetry. Indeed, poetry and writing became that primary venue for dialogue when bodies no longer free to express the invitation in the streets. As some of us noted frequently, for as creative as the strike was, there was rarely ever poetry used. *Was it because the strike itself was a living, breathing poetry?*

Even those actions inspired by the strike, too carried this political potential. By way of conclusion, I discuss an activist intervention that came in the moments after both strikes had ended: smartaction, the collaborative art exhibit I mentioned at the start of this chapter. By describing the exhibit which was meant to publicize the student struggle in the United States and resonated with but not limited to a recounting of the strike itself, it shows us how art although ephemeral has a lasting effect on *lucha*.

### ***Artwork: Threading across the boundaries of space/time***

The idea of this chapter finally found form when I attended SmARTaction which as I mentioned at the start of this chapter, was an exhibit collaboration between two masters' students from NYU. It ran from October 3- November 29 in Hostos Community College in the South Bronx and included artwork from both strikes as well as pieces inspired by them. *I had difficulty entering into the building when I arrived, as a Hostos officer who was sitting in the guard post refused letting me in. If it weren't for another officer who knew of the UPR exhibit as she called it, I probably would never*

*have made it inside. The irony of siting a public exhibit for a protest against the privatization of the university in a closed campus was not lost on me.* I finally made it to the atrium after crossing the bridge and was shocked at how all at once I became overwhelmed by a powerful rush of emotions flooded through me as I stood there. As I walked in, I was impressed by the hanging book which read on the front cover—Rights—hanging from a metal clamp aptly titled colgao (hung). To the front, two banners hung from the upper level banister of the atrium. They too were from the second strike and read: 0 policia (police) 0 cuota (fee). Although some of the art especially that which was contributed by allies, and artists not a part of the strike on the ground I had seen for the first time, there was a sense of having seen it all before. Of having felt this all before.

Having arrived on closing day, the exhibit was already missing Papel Machete's militant student made for the first strike. Although as I was told by Stephan (one of the curators of the exhibit), he hung from the ceiling—a specter of /for justice as he was throughout the 2010-11 student strike. It was in this exhibit that I realized how the two struggles were bound up with one another—the creative strike and the “no to the quota (fee)” —not just because they were back to back—but because of the way that they collapsed the two moments, creating a sense that activism inhabits the interstice of silence and free open expression.

The shifting registers of artistic interventions show that the struggle—this humanistic spirit for a free and critical quality education—lives on through the performances and images that circulate. The durability of affective resonances generated by viewing them long after the strikes had been lifted tell us that even as



extremely ephemeral performances, their significance lives on beyond the site of controversy through which these critiques emerge. These acts of dissensus—those performances, images and claims that worked to disrupt a facile understanding of the collective—serve as the memory of the movement, the time that lives on. What is most striking to me about these ambitious artifacts is that they serve as a platform for participation even for those who were just witnesses and in solidarity without necessarily being in the movement.

In lieu of a conclusion, I ask my readers to turn to Appendix C and review the smARTaction catalogue as a means of thinking of how even the closures enacted by the police, enabled by the university administration could not successfully quell the feeling of possibility that exists between the lines of repression and silencing. An unwillingness to be quiet and to forgo other possibilities despite the radical uncertainty “which animates our time” (Rebollo Gil 2012) is for me the most important lesson to be gleaned from activist interventions. It is this openness of imagination which is needed to sustain any revolutionary praxis which breaks away from old patterns of being with others and doing politics in the future.

## On Intentional Spaces and the Politics of Autonomy

In this dissertation, I have emphasized the intimate realm of social struggle to provide insight into how temporary resistance spaces serve to shape activists' political subjectivities and deepen their commitment to *la lucha*. Part of my interest in understanding the role of the ephemeral is contextual. As I explained in the prologue, I landed in Puerto Rico in a moment of great political upheaval, and a sense that things had to change was palpable. To be able to witness this period was a great gift and was what invariably led me to focus on the matter of temporality and argue that this moment of political possibility be understood as "revolutionary time." I believe that my work's emphasis on temporality is useful for ethnographers everywhere that may be searching for a language to name the embodied knowledge of bearing witness to a time of change.

One of the challenges I faced in documenting ephemeral spaces of resistance was to show how they become a ground for experimenting with alternative political realities. One of the issues that predominates in discussions of social struggle (and any attempt to analyze emergent trends and the present moment) is to focus on outcomes and to write from a point of view that frames a struggle as over. To think about social movements over time causes many activists and committed folks to take on a negative affect toward *lucha*. As a result of a retrospective looking, the significance of the ephemeral is diminished by knowledge of what has been "won" or "lost." By contrast, in my work I develop a narrative that recreates the flow of practice of "occupation" in time in order to demonstrate how abstract practices are enacted at the level of being in the world (Jackson 1998, 2002; Stewart 2007). By emphasizing the affective

dimensions of these ephemeral space/times, I provided a texture of how events can generate or efface a sense of political possibility. By emphasizing the process and the sense of revolutionary time, I aimed to amplify the poetics of resistance space.

Given my interest in the “meantime” of political action, I used the term ephemeral instead of temporary to describe these resistance spaces. Although they both signal something of a limited duration, I use ephemeral because of its ties to ideas of beauty. At the end of the day, I think that is the biggest intervention activists can make—stimulating the imagination of others, giving them release from the hum drum world of impossibilities, and failures and known outcomes. One of my claims is that it is worthwhile to linger with the beauty and the possibility of the process. As such, I take the project of writing about ephemeral resistance spaces as one that can contribute to a new affective disposition toward possible futures heretofore unimagined. As I mentioned in my introduction, I was inspired to work toward this goal by J.K. Gibson-Graham who in their collaborative oeuvre advocate for a postcapitalist politics by emphasizing the alternatives that already which contest capitalist logics. Since each ephemeral space was itself part of a larger anti-privatization struggle, I consider it appropriate to follow Gibson-Graham when writing of them.

Although I was keen to highlight that these spaces and strategies are not completely new, it was vital for me to connect it to a longstanding project of anticolonial organizing in Puerto Rico. As I argued in the introduction, activists in both spaces were motivated to contest what they saw as outmoded modes of resistance, a project that I used to underscore their compatibility with projects of decolonization and self-determination for Puerto Ricans who remain colonial subjects’ vis-à-vis the US

nation-state. However, I like my interlocutors, am not interested in claiming that these grassroots movements articulate in any facile way to the project of political decolonization. Instead, I have tried to propose that activists begin to think of their work as one of decolonizing the self. As many postcolonial authors have argued, decolonization is a project that requires breaking with old modes of interacting with others, and static visions of the future. Frantz Fanon wrote of this problem with sharp clarity: "...decolonization is not an event that happens in history; it is rather the shattering of that history and the opening to an otherwise that cannot be given in advance, but that is always, like justice, to come" (Fanon in Kawash 1996:235). As such, one of the ways I advocate for decolonization is by upholding the meantime offered by working for justice in temporary spaces.

There are two key terms that have operated as a specter in understanding how activists enact decolonization in resistance spaces: intention and autonomy. Despite the fact that activists in *campa* and the UPR mobilized the strategy of direct action to promote autonomous conditions, I hastened to underscore that their intentions and visions of autonomy were not the same. Indeed, the notion of autonomy proffered in each space was radically different—in *campa*, the emphasis was on refusing the current options without necessarily cultivating another model. The evidence that one had entered an autonomous zone there was reflected in the spatial transformations—an anti-establishment design (as I was told by one interlocutor, *campa* has no structure) that was understood to be a free space for community interaction. It offered a place for interactions between a non-activist public and radical leftists who often find themselves engaged in impromptu debates about politics and everyday small problems. As such, it

served as a unique meeting place that brought together people across class divides. It also served as a meeting ground for other activists who needed a place to hold meetings when they couldn't in their home bases. While hardcore activists who remained for years on end occupying the space shared a resolute sense of the need to sacrifice in the name of the public, the community of resident squatters themselves also held a strongly individualist notion of autonomy in the day to day operation of the campsite. They did what they wanted and did not respond well to calls for dialogue, collaboration or reflection.

Part of the distinction between the visions of autonomy may also have to do with the composition of each group. Although it is harder to fix an average demographic in campsite than in the university, they were on the whole composed of activists who are older and more permanently precarious than student strikers. This may have contributed to why the members of the campsite were not interested in permanent solutions, or developing a wider organizational base. They were satisfied to just find a space where they could be in control of their daily life, and to find ways to live outside the normative structures and were consequently, less invested in building new organizational structures or projects.

By contrast, the student-strikers at the UPR, while precarious too, understood that their position as students would eventually come to an end, and most accepted and/or looked forward to eventually joining the ranks of the professional class upon graduation. On a basic level, the struggle for autonomy there could simply be traced to the claims for university autonomy. The notion of university autonomy posits that the university should remain free from political currents, a project increasingly difficult to

fight for amidst increasing corporatization of institutions of higher learning. Their intention in organizing their strike following the principles of participatory democracy was a way of speaking against the narrowing of decision making power in these neoliberal times. As such, their vision of an autonomous community emphasized cultivating the communal through broad based participation and collective decision making processes.

As I described in the prologue, the student strike was a direct result of the massive protests I witnessed just two weeks after my arrival to the island. And the strike which ensued circled continuously around the slogan: “please excuse the inconvenience, we are building a new country.” This motto may be familiar to other activists but was slightly distinct from the similar motto used by Chilean student strikers: “pardon the inconvenience we are building a public university.” Whereas both the Chilean strike(s) and UPR strikes were at base, about opposition to neoliberal economic policies and the rising cost of public education, in Puerto Rico the claim for defending university autonomy related not just to privatization but the need of promoting self-determination for Puerto Ricans in political process. They imagined their strike, with its emphasis on direct participation and non-hierarchical modes of engagement to be an example of what could be: An autonomous zone that emphasized community, collaboration and dialogue.

Like the spaces I worked in, I see this work as an exercise in experimentation. Of course, as we know, in spaces of experimentation some of what is achieved goes beyond what may be intended. As I explained in the introduction, one of my biggest goals in this work was to produce a piece of writing that centered the ephemeral and

emphasized the process of engaging in radical political action. In re-reading my dissertation, I have noticed the recursive nature of my writing. It wasn't something I set out to do beforehand, but I believe that this instinctual approach marks one of my overarching interventions. In taking similar starting points and following them through different aspects of *la lucha*, I am able to clarify the multiple significance(s) of one given data set. I have found this to be a useful strategy in crafting nonlinear narrative of resistance because it shows how the sense of radical possibility travels and morphs when I make different objects the focus of attention. In this sense, the writing itself mirrors Söderbäck's claim that revolutionary time is always conditioned by a return to the past.

To take one example, my study of the gardening projects undertaken by both activists in *campa* and in the UPR undergoes various iterations in each chapter. First, they get a positive look when they are referenced in dead time, allowing us to see with sharp clarity what the effects of occupation can be. Then, they themselves become a tool of resistance in the chapter on the rise of the gardening projects, and give us pause when considering what the possibilities of an intersectional vision of justice can be. Finally, the gardens serve as a mirror for the internal problems of *la convivencia*, or getting along with those that one cohabitates. In this chapter, the garden demonstrates how the gaps between what we strive for and what we actually achieve shape the possibilities for remaking public space. To my mind, the benefit of this strategy is that it shows how different problems are intertwined with one another. Such attention has far-reaching significance for what is the most basic challenge of social justice work—refining the self and one's mode of being with others—without just claiming it.

Although it was not always possible to do so, I emphasize the unmediated narrative—attending to the momentary glimmers and how they can teach us more sustained practices of “communality” and ways/routes to escape old forms of subjection.

Beyond my contributions in the arena of writing, this dissertation contributes to the study of contemporary modes of political engagement and offers one way of how we can better study movements, what Asef Bayat calls “nonmovements” (2010) that evade our traditional tools of analysis. By looking closely at the micropolitics of political action, I follow other anthropologists’ fine grained analysis of resistance which attend to the relationship between activists’ efforts “live their politics” amidst moments of radical political uncertainty. By bringing Puerto Rico into debates on the changing field of resistance, I also subvert the tendency to marginalize the Caribbean from questions of political resistance, particularly those island nations who have not followed a traditional path to decolonization. My work shows that Puerto Rico is in fact, a place well worthy for studying questions of activism and resistance and can help to clarify some of the ways that the normative logics of state-based politics are being undercut in the present moment. By remaining committed to using the term revolution, while associating it with efforts to promote zones of autonomy, I highlight its connection to decoloniality, a project of undoing the lasting influence of colonial logics on our sense of self, and community.

While I do believe that holding on to static notions of the future limits possibilities for achieving social justice, I also understand that the real reason for taking action is to create lasting change. Without the possibility for creating new radical political realities, there would be no reason to continue to act. One of the things I plan



to do in future iterations of this project is to think (carefully) with longer historical trends without sacrificing my attention to the ephemeral. I believe this is a necessary challenge given that all of the constitutive experiences and strategies that I identified through my research—creativity, love, making/creating, presence (present), and being—are themselves longstanding tactics mobilized by those actors committed to nonviolent resistance.

## **EPILOGUE: INCALCULABLE JUSTICE**

When I left Puerto Rico in May 2011, I was utterly enthralled by all the possibilities made tenable through my participation in temporary spaces of resistance. I returned to teach a class on the relationship between crisis and resistance, witnessing other movements like #Occupy emerge, suggesting that the struggles I participated in Puerto Rico were part of a larger trend that would destabilize neoliberal logics and eventually change the way that activists envision and enact politics. As such, in this dissertation, I have posited that the ephemeral and the processual allow us to fully inhabit a revolutionary present and therefore, represent an avenue that will generate new possibilities for doing politics.

When I came back to visit the island in January 2012, some of that enthusiasm for a different way of creating political communities of resistance was still alive. The influence that the UPR student strikes had on other movement spaces was clear. For example, members of *campa* had begun to develop action committees, inviting new participants to become a part of their movement in a much more open and participatory forum. But the external context also was less open.

The university administration had recently unveiled a new security plan for the institution. As I walked into campus on the day before classes were set to begin, I noticed laborers busy installing new machinery at access points across the campus, including new gates and machines to read the (now required) electronic seals for all vehicles approved to be on campus. In addition to these signs of the intensified security on campus, I noticed that the security guard houses had also been replaced. It was no

longer a simple concrete structure with a front area for officers to sit in and a bathroom in the back I often used to wash up in the morning hours during the strike when I stayed in the Humanities camp. Now, it was a sleek and shiny grey material that looks like it could be bullet proof. Its newness has a foreign feel, and looked markedly distinct than the other buildings and apparatus of the university. The shape is rounded at the edges, giving the viewer the sense that they have been transported to a sci-fi movie.

When Giovanni showed me the power point that had been circulating of the New Security Plan, I still could not imagine it. After the entire plan is in place, very few cars will be permitted on campus and you'll need to show your identification card to get into the campus. Electric-run trolleys driven by University Police will be used to transport students across the 204 acre campus—just another part of the “Green Campus Initiative.” Two other gas-run vehicles will be reserved for members of The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and will transport them to their special parking lot.

On January 8, 2011, student Camila Rodríguez Estrada was arrested and detained for eleven hours after refusing to show her student identification to new guards that had been hired by private security company Guardsmark to patrol the campus. This incident allows us to get a glimpse of what the new security plan might mean for activists in the future. During the court hearing for Camila's case, Angel R. Rolón, supervisor of the University Guard admitted that showing identification was not required to enter the Río Piedras campus and the request that Estrada Rodriguez showed her id was selective. When Rodríguez Estrada was released she echoed these statements, adding her own interpretation of the ambiguous statement of the officer. She argued this was a blatant persecution and was quoted in the news with a defiant and apt

sound bite: ya estoy ficha (I'm already on file).<sup>1</sup> As a member of The International Socialist Organization—OSI—and participation in the 2010-11 strikes, most fellow activists found her claim to be a probable and logical one. However discomforting the issue may be as an isolated incident, it is even more so when it is understood that this incident is representative of what is to become new policy of the university. The direction of new policy seems to be unclear; that is to say, it has moved in two directions that are opposed (at least rhetorically). On the one hand, we have a policy of open campus, part of the official reasoning behind getting rid of the gates of the university but on the other hand, by insisting that folks show identification to enter the campus, the administration supports the restriction of resources and accessibility of the campus.

These signs are part of a shift toward the new vision of the public university in Puerto Rico as it has been imagined by The Advisory Committee on the Future of Higher Education in Puerto Rico (Comité Asesor sobre el Futuro de la Educación Superior en Puerto Rico). The committee members include Antonio Santiago Vázquez José M. Saldaña, ex-president of the UPR system; two Professor Manuel Gómez, Professor of and Vice-President for Research and Academic Affairs at the Río Piedras campus and Ignacio Echenique surgeon; The Director of the City and Regional Planning Elías Gutiérrez; the ex-president of the Board of Trustees Ygrí Rivera and chemical engineer Daneris Fernández who currently serves as Vice President of

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<sup>1</sup> Camila's statement refers to *el carpeteo*, a practice of compiling secret files of political dissidents run by the Division of Intelligence of the Puerto Rican Police from roughly 1952-1986. Although *el carpeteo* was found to be unconstitutional and outlawed in 1988 by the Supreme Court (see Noriega Rodríguez et al. v. Hernández-Colón, 122 DPR 650 (November 21, 1988); 130 DPR 919 (June 30, 1992), her claim that the police already have a file on her points to a popular understanding that police surveillance practices continued unabated in the present.

manufacturing operations of pharmaceutical corporation Merck & Co. All of the members of the advisory committee were appointed by then Governor Luis Fortuño to assess the future of higher education on the island but this is not the first time they come together. They also met in February 2011 during the second strike under the official, if ambiguous name, la Comisión Asesora (The Advisory Commission) while a multi-sector group of protestors protested the police presence in the University. In a press release by the Fortaleza about the group and their meetings, they discussed plans such as how to study and offer ideas about the vision and the future necessities of higher education, particularly as it applied to the UPR.

Members of the Board of Trustees as well as other professors who had been fighting for university reform were worried by the composition of the committee because the members had no allegiance to those who been advocating for reform. In fact, the members of the Governor appointed committee are known to be openly in favor of increasing the bureaucratization of the university and advocate closer relationship between the university and the government. This perspective is reflected by the language in the report that focuses on imagining a more efficient and relevant higher education.

It is not surprising that the future of the public institution is dependent on envisioning ways to respond to student protest. In the report issued by the committee, members speak openly about the need to promote a change that will give relevance to the university in moving Puerto Rico out of social-economic crossroads it finds itself in. The report begins with a philosophical statement that unambiguously defines education of the future as one that is invested in science, technology and research. They write,

“Our main resource is our people, and the knowledge they possess must be useful and relevant. Our workers must be knowledge workers, generating ideas that result in new products, goods and services produced in Puerto Rico and sold in global markets” (3). *And I wonder, oh better close the drain before all the educated Ricans make their way stateside. How is it relevant to produce more specialized learning without also creating employment for these students?*

These changes at the University and student’s responses to them got me thinking seriously about the extramovement outcomes that I have explicitly bracketed out (Riles 1998) in the dissertation. In this chapter, I look directly at the “push backs” which the different branches of the Government of Puerto Rico and the University of Puerto Rico instituted in response to the success of the student strike of 2010 and the resistance encampments built on sites of controversial construction projects that Amigos del M.A.R. has sponsored on the island. In my opinion, examples of how laws and policies attempt to eliminate the possibility for enacting temporary spaces of resistance in the future suggest that these practices of *lucha* do destabilize neoliberal logics, so much so that the Government and administrators of the public institution seek to criminalize them.

By turning outward to the “law” as a means of concluding the text, I do not mean to suggest that justice is bound to it. Instead, I believe that in turning to the law, we find a different means of engaging the question of how to cultivate a new affective disposition for revolutionary politics. We can also think carefully about how revolutionary time can be foreclosed by repression and new ideas of the legal.

Having said this, I want to underscore my confidence that activists I know will still work to disrupt and undermine practices of capitalism in their everyday lives, creating space(s) from which to contest such policies. *And this is a live document too. As I write my final draft some of these laws have already been repealed.* Alongside my narrative recounting of all that has come to pass, I offer breaks from my discussion of the legal changes that are inspired by Jacques Derrida's arguments in "Force of Law" (1989). In these breaks, I not only concur alongside Derrida the necessity of pursuing justice beyond the determinations of the law, but I also question activists' tendency to claim repeals of laws as retrospective evidence that their struggle has been "won." To my mind, such claims whether strategic or not, efface the ephemeral and the process oriented direction of the first strike in ways that are problematic.

As Derrida argued there, it is necessary to rethink the link between force and justice and to instead emphasize that justice is incalculable. By underscoring that the realm of justice lies outside calculation, I find Derrida's argument of the fallacy of the juridical (and indeed, any) system's logic to also be relevant for emphasizing my claim that we move away from linear and chronological renderings of social movements to track their significance, in favor of processual, affective and embodied terrains.

### ***Standing as a Form of Exclusion: New Permits Law***

Even before the student strike of 2010 and the massive protests against Law 7 which was passed on March 9, 2009, Law 161 was signed into law. The new permits law eases the process of securing a permit for construction projects on the island. Law 161 centralized the construction permits process from a complicated web of regulatory

agencies into one government office known as *Gerencia de Permisos* or the Office of Permits management (OgPe). In order to re-construct the permits process, Law 161 amends and negates a whole series of laws that were designed as checks and balances which were designed to prevent the likelihood of environmentally hazardous construction projects from being approved. As such the new structure under Law 161 eliminates all the current recourses for challenging and checking the feasibility of a project placing all decision making power within the OgPe.

The New Permits Law caused relatively little commotion when it was passed and it was not until I attended a workshop in late June 2010 for community groups organized by *la Asociación Nacional de Derecho Ambiental* (the National Environmental Law Association; ANDA) that I learned of the significance the law. Attorney Pedro Saade, law professor and one of the attorneys on the case for *campa*, asserted that the dismantling of certain forms of direct action was the actual premise of the law. He read from a government memo which lamented the surge in the public's contestation of construction projects, something that the elite had themselves fomented (*la misma burguesía ha creado*). The allegation he quoted was followed by a series of examples to justify their position including: Paseo Caribe, Ruta 66 and Cemex.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These three examples refer to a panorama of protests waged over the environmental controversy regarding key development projects. The first, Paseo Caribe refers to a luxury condominium complex to be built at the entrance to the Old San Juan islet whose development was halted by activists who undertook direct actions to contest its construction in front of San Jerónimo, a historic fort and on lands that were part of the public maritime coastal zone. Route 66 refers to a proposed expansion of the island's main expressway into Fajardo passing through the national rainforest, El Yunque. The main issue here was that the construction would disrupt the integrity of the reserve, as ground movements effect the ability of the forest to capture rain water and alters runoff routes. Massive protests including direct actions that involved stealing beams after they had been installed caused the route to be altered at Río Grande. Cemex is a concrete production company based in Ponce, Puerto Rico and were ordered to stop burning tires after a massive community mobilization contested the Environmental Quality Board's approval of their proposal to burn 2.5 million used tires to produce cement without completing an Environmental Impact Statement or holding public hearings in the community.



One the worst parts of the new law for environmental activists and community groups is that it strictly limited who can legitimately intervene in the process of permit granting. Whereas in the past all one had to do was to demonstrate that there was a public interest in the issue to be able to legitimately contest a construction project, after the passage of Law 161 in order to have standing to call a proposed construction into question, the opposition must be able to demonstrate a clear and direct proprietary interest in the land in question. Even when the opposition is successful in challenging the project, the only way it can be halted at all is if it represents an imminent danger to the public health or security, in which case it can only be halted immediately for ten days and no longer than twenty days.

Such attitudes geared to limit legitimate avenues to express dissent aim to criminalize more radical forms of protest suggest that protesting in the streets obstructs the legal process rather than promotes it. But, this claim totally denies the fact that the legal process is often a very onerous process and that when it comes to construction projects already in process, this very slow time of the law can make it impossible for anyone to question and stop a project which is already in process. In sum, the standing through which community groups or concerned citizens' aired general concerns were destabilized under the new structure, effectively limiting the rights of the everyday citizen to contest privatization. Moreover, Law 161 established extreme penalties—jail time up to 180 days or a fine of up to \$10,000, or both—to any person who paralyzes, obstructs, invades or interrupts a proposed construction without legal authorization. The penalties section of the law is clearly aimed at lessening citizen and community group's power to challenge construction projects. The repressive changes proposed by the new

law point to the fact that the government's administration was bent on undermining occupation, or rescaté (rescue) efforts.

***Amendment 208(a): Tito Kayak's Law and Puerto Rico's Penal Code***

Amendment 208 (a), like Law 161 is one of a series of legislative efforts approved by Governor Fortuño, to repress free speech by limiting legal avenues for expressing dissent.<sup>3</sup> These legal statutes aim to intimidate people with hefty economic penalties and jail time so fewer participate in direct action. Beyond the economic implications of these changes, the problem is legal protections that once were only applied to institutions but are slowly being applied more broad strokes to other arenas.

In contrast to Law 161, Amendment 208(a) was hotly contested since September 2010 when it appeared as a proposal in the Senate under the name Project 1505. A proposed amendment to the penal code, Amendment 208(a) became popularly referred to as "Tito Kayak's Law" in reference to activist Alberto de Jesus, known for his use of occupation as a way to draw attention to construction projects that are controversial. Indeed, such links were not only metaphorical, they were literal.

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<sup>3</sup>In addition to Law 161 which preceded the passage of Amendment 208(a) by several months, two other amendments to the penal code were proposed that seem to be conceptualized as a way to prevent the student strikes: Article 297 known as "resistance or obstruction to the legislative function" and Article 246(a) known as "obstruction of access or work in educational institutions and health or buildings where government services are offered to the Public." The latter makes it a misdemeanor to block health or educational facilities. The former Article 297 carries a sentence of three years to any person who commits "any action that interrupts or diminishes the appropriate respect for..." the legislature building or in front of any member of commissioner who is serving in his/her public function (my translation). Although I do not have clear evidence between these new amendments and the student protests as I do in the case of Amendment 208(a), they are clearly responses to the student protests, both the catastrophic ones held immediately outside the Capitol building on June 30, 2010 and the strike which immobilized the University system for 62 days. Given that my evidence directly links Amendment 208 (a) to preventing direct action, I will focus on it in this chapter.

In the original proposal presented by statehood party member, Senator Antonio Soto Díaz, he justified the law by citing Paseo Caribe, a high-rise luxury apartment building whose construction was halted for almost six years as a result of public controversy that erupted after activists alleged the project was being built on public lands. Of the most spectacular manifestations of the protest was Tito Kayak's week-long occupation of a crane on-site as well as an on-site encampment on a small grassy area between the construction site and the street which inhabited by activists for several months. Unlike in the case of *campa* where I worked, the construction was ongoing while the activists were on-site and there were many confrontations between the workers and activists.

Senator Soto Díaz's justification for creating the amendment was to protect developers, the flow of traffic and to secure the public good by protecting private property which he argued took precedent over limits placed on the right to free expression. (La protección de vida y de la propiedad es mayor que la restricción a imponer sanciones o límites de la expresión). Immediate opposition highlighted that the measure was unconstitutional since it targeted forms of direct action and placed those who opposed privatization at a disadvantage vis-à-vis those with more pro-capital positions. But Soto Díaz claimed that the measure was simply a means to regulate the time and place of protest, well within the realm of the constitutional. In the House of Representatives report they concurred with Soto Díaz by arguing that freedom of expression is not absolute and that it can and will be limited if it interferes with the common good and public interest.

Despite claims that the measure did not target a particular kind of expression, a letter of support written by the Association of General Contractors of America (La Asociación de Contratistas Generales de América), included in the report issued by the Committee on Judiciary and Ethics makes it clear that supporters had envisioned a very particular target population. In their letter they expressed interest in including another clause that would specifically target repeat offenders, what they describe as “professional activists” and those who use masks (capuchas) during their protest. As the supporting documents make clear, this amendment targets anyone who would desire to use direct action to contest a construction project, defining him/her as a criminal and not a citizen with rights to be protected.

In the final approved version of the proposal, the law reads as follows:

Any person who intends to prevent, temporarily or permanently, any construction, public or private, or movement of land, which has the permits, authorizations or endorsements of the agencies concerned, and performs the following acts shall be guilty of a fourth degree felony: (a) Prevent the entry or access by employees, vehicles and people, including suppliers of materials authorized by the owner, contractor or manager of the property where the work is performed. (b) To occupy land, machinery, or spaces that are part of the construction or ground movement. The court will also impose the penalty of restitution.

The central concern of those who are opposed to the amendment is that the wording is too vague, particularly in its stipulation of intent. That is to say, the amendment’s preamble sets forth that any person who intends to occupy or otherwise impede any aspect of the construction process will be subject to arrest. As I have described elsewhere, the first case being tried under amendment 208 (a) is known as the Wind Farm case (Rosario 2012:11). In that instance, a group of six protestors were arrested for blocking one of several entrances to the land when the first wind turbine was to be

installed on agricultural reserve lands that form part of el Corredor Agrícola de la Costa Sur de Puerto Rico (The Agricultural Corridor of the Southern Coast of Puerto Rico). Although the protestors allege that they did not directly impede the workers from doing their job, or occupy the lands where the turbine was to be installed, they were still arrested and are in the judicial process. *This just in!! (March 27, 2013, Ponce) his honorable Eduardo Busquets dropped the charges and declared Amendment 208(a) unconstitutional for discouraging legitimate protests protected by the first amendment right to free expression.* This case could establish that intent to occupy is as simple as picketing outside a construction site. If found guilty, each protestor will face up to three years of jail time in addition to paying restitution to Pattern Energy, a hefty sum of \$6 million.

Amendment 208 (a) is based on a premise that once a developer possesses government approval, its project is totally legitimate, irrespective of public sentiment. In that sense, it should be seen as a continuation of Law 161 which eliminated the checks and balances in the permits approval process. By making the courts the only site of legitimate resistance, this legislation excludes the average citizen, forcing all dissenters to engage in a financially onerous and slow process.

### ***Student (does not equal) Striker***

In this section, I am interested in showing how the law was used to create a definition of the student that was not compatible with the identity of a striker. Most important for my purposes are the Supreme Court ruling in *Government of Puerto Rico vs. Gabriel Laborde et al.* which established precedent that students do not have the

right to strike. By linking to the findings of a report issued by a special committee on the Future of Higher Education appointed by (then) Governor Luis Fortuño, I show that these cases have to do with the limits of free expression as much as the amendments to the penal code do.

The case *Government of Puerto Rico vs. Gabriel Laborde et.al* was first brought by interim rector Ana Guadalupe who sought to secure a permanent injunction against various student leaders as a way of immobilizing the student strike. At first, the claims were rejected by the court and it was this initial win that enabled the strike of 2010 to flourish into the creative manifestation it was. But in December 2010, when the second strike was just about to begin, the lower court's ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court.

Although the first strike had ended, at issue was the vote of a "preventive strike" which was approved at the first national student assembly held in the Juan Pachín Vicens Coliseum in Ponce, Puerto Rico. If the quota was not eliminated by January 2011, then students would resume striking. In agreement with the administration who argued that the student's lift of the strike was merely temporary, the court drew on public statements made by the leaders who were arrested to prove that lifting the strike was not intended to be a permanent act. As such, they found it appropriate to rule on the matter of what kind of forum the university is and what are the limits of free expression within it.

In a decision of 4-2, with one abstention, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico declared that the student strike was illegal. Following federal precedent, they argued that although the university is a public forum, that it must be distinguished from

traditional public forums (46). The decision of 106 pages was written by his honorable Martínez Torres. The following excerpt is indicative of the way that the court excluded striking from a legitimate mode of engaging in free expression:

What students call a “strike” is not anything but a collective student protest. Although students do not have the right to strike, they can protest in an organized and coordinated manner, as long as they fulfill their duties as a student and whenever they do not interfere with the normal university work and rights of those who do not agree with their protest and want to attend classes (50). (my translation).

Lo que los estudiantes recurridos llaman una “huelga” no es otra cosa que una protesta estudiantil colectiva y organizada. Aunque los estudiantes no tienen derecho a huelga, sí pueden protestar de manera organizada y coordinada, siempre que no incumplan los deberes que asumieron como estudiantes y que están en el Reglamento de Estudiantes, y siempre que no interfieran impermisiblemente con la normalidad de las tareas universitarias y los derechos de aquellos que no piensan como ellos y que quieren asistir a clases (50).

In the above except from the court’s decision, student protest is explicitly distinguished from the idea of a strike. Although no actual rationale for why a student cannot also be a striker is given beyond that they do not have the right to do so in this line, in a later section, we find that the court follows the definition laid out by the U.S. National Board of Labor Relations that has rejected the notion that students have the right to strike. In the definition by the court, “a strike is an action taken by a group of employees ... in order to interrupt, stop or stop the work and services of the business operated by the employer, to improve the living conditions of workers.” (La huelga es una acción concertada de un grupo de empleados que se efectúa con el propósito de interrumpir, paralizar o detener las labores y servicios del negocio operado por el patrono, para mejorar las condiciones de vida de los trabajadores).

In the following sentence of Martínez Torres' sentence that I quoted above, we find another reason why the court seeks to limit the definition of a strike when he describes the importance of keeping school open so that those who are not in agreement with the strike can still attend school. The student's individual relationship with the institution is a contractual one. That is to say, that students are more analogous to consumers than workers. From the Supreme Court's perspective, the majority view does not carry a privileged status in a university context—it's the minority view—the fact that there might be any student who does not support the strike is enough for the court to declare the need for the school to remain open. This framing ignores the fact that a strike is meant to exert pressure on the administration to make a change—an effect which strikers can mobilize by closing operations. If the university were to run as if it were any day, then there would be no reason to care about student protestors and their demands. As we saw in the case of the first strike, the administration refused to even dialogue with students until the strike had been ongoing for over a week.

Once this order was passed by the Supreme Court, it did not matter much that the students were striking and although Judge Martínez Torres claimed that this ruling would in no way limit students' right to other approved forms of protest, it did help to legitimate the repression of free speech and of limiting the rights of expression that came in the second strike. In that period from December 2010-February 2011 students were unable to occupy the campus *anyway* because after they lifted their 48 hour stoppage, police entered the campus and occupied it for the duration of the strike. Routine visits from SWAT team specialists and plain clothes officers formed a compliment to the officers who arrested and stalked student activists on the campus.



In addition, the rector of the school, Ana Guadeloupe instituted a moratorium on all student movement activities, prohibiting gathering of large groups including festivals, picketing, marches, rallies and other activities with massive participation inside the campus for a period of 30 days. The prohibited activities could be held in the designated areas outside the three main gates which could be identified by a banner that read “Area of Public Expression” usually flanked by a small cadre of members of the state police force. *The force of the law was palpable at these boundaries of the institution and the officers there suggested that silence was the only thing protected within the free speech zone.*

When newly elected García Padilla, member of the commonwealth party (PPD) was running against Fortuño (PNP), he promised that one of his first jobs if elected would be to reverse Law 7’s cuts on the university budget and to eliminate the \$800 quota instituted by the Board of Trustees during the first strike, a policy that left approximately 10,000 without the financial means to return to the school in January 2011. In what was a not surprising move, García Padilla took the credit when the UPR Board of Trustees suddenly voted to eliminate the quota in 2013 that the administration claimed was essential and not subject for debate just two years earlier. I was surprised when I saw my interlocutors’ Facebook pages claim it as a victory won by students in the second strike. Ricardo—one of the founders and main correspondents of Strike Radio’s was the most surprising. He wrote:

We won both rounds. Of two, two. We’re bating a thousand. Damn, the arrests, the broken heads, the bruises, the pepper (spray), the gases, the broken relationships, the tears, weren’t in vain. Today, more than ever, I feel proud that I was a part of the student movement, class 2009-2013. A hug with a conspiratorial smile to every striker. Let’s celebrate. We

deserve it. That quota won't happen, damn it. Who said that it wasn't worth it to struggle?

(Ganamos los dos rounds. De dos, dos. Bateamos para mil. Coño, que los arrestos, las cabezas rotas, los chichones, el pepper, los lacrimógenos, las relaciones rotas, las lágrimas, no fueron en vano. Hoy más que nunca me siento orgulloso de haber sido parte del movimiento estudiantil clase 2009-2013. Un abrazo con sonrisa conspirativa a todas y todos los huelguistas. Celebremos. Lo merecemos. Que esa cuota no va, carajo. ¿Quién fue el que dijo que no vale la pena luchar?)

Beyond my own sense that the repeal of the fiscal stabilization fee is yet another strategy to play one political party off of one another, there seems to be something missing in Ricardo's sense of victory and sense of neglect for the process of *lucha* that he once so fervently supported and cited as the most important outcome of the strike. Moreover, although the Board of Trustees did vote to eliminate the quota (fiscal stabilization fee), there was no talk of returning the \$300 million in funds that were eliminated from the University budget when Law 7 was passed and they still will need to generate a large sum of money to deal with that. *When I watched a clip from Wapa.tv on the day the repeal was announced, I was shocked to hear that the University saved over \$100 million during the two years that the quota was collected. I thought they were running with a deficit?*

Beyond monetary concerns it seems to be that some of that "spirit" of *lucha* was lost when Ricardo upheld that broken relationships and the other affective destruction that participating in a strike when the external conditions had changed so much was worth it. It conceded the force of the law, the retrospective power in his statement. In conformity with the law—the sit ins, the protests, taking endless beatings by the

police—justice is served. As Derrida reminds us, a “successful” revolution like the intelligibility of the law:

...will produce after the fact [après coup] what it was destined in advance to produce...to give sense, necessity and above all legitimacy to the violence that has produces, among others...the discourse of its self-legitimation” (2002:270).

Through establishing such a retrospective link to justice through the law, the logic of prefigurative political action is undone and wiped away. There is no sense of accounting for the different strategies of resistance as all of the means have been justified by the repeal of the fee.

Miriam’s status was a bit more moderate in its joy for the news.

Now we are content because we know that they eliminated the quota (fee) thanks to our sacrifice. Obviously there is much more to achieve. But we know that many more can study, or at least can try to. We won’t forget what it cost us and we will fight so that they let the students who were expelled return to study again. And we aren’t so crazy to think that as of now the struggle is over.

...Ahora estamos contentos porque sabemos que si eliminaron la cuota fue gracias a nuestro sacrificio. Obviamente falta mucho más que lograr. Pero ya sabemos que much@s podrán estudiar, al menos, podrán intentarlo. No olvidaremos lo que nos costó y lucharemos para que le permitan la entrada de nuevo a los expulsados. Y no estamos tan locos como para pensar que aquí acabó la lucha.

I would agree with Miriam, the struggle is far from over. But it made me wonder what was the purpose of the photograph taken by a group of huelguistas sitting on the steps in front of the university’s iconic clock tower with a new red banner that said “vencimos” (we won), in honor of the black venceremos (we will win) that was made and hung from the clock tower during the strike.



(photo courtesy of Gamelyn Oduardo Sierra)

**FIGURE 13: *Vencimos***

The past tense doesn't have the same ring to it as the justice that is to come. As Derrida claims, the location of justice is always future tense. "Justice remains *to come*, it remains *by coming*, It *has* to come, it *is* to come, it deploys the very dimension of events irreducibly to come. It will always have it, this á-venir, and it will always have had it" (256). The finality of the idea that they had "won" (won what exactly?—certainly it was not a triumph of that revolutionary spirit of 2010) might work as a media stunt, as a mode of reasserting the power and importance of the strikes waged from 2010-2011 but beyond that, such linearity frightened me.

Many of the laws and policies passed under the Fortuño administration are already contested and it appears that many will be eliminated. While repealing some of these very dangerous and unconstitutional measures of these things point to the real material effects that party politics can create on the ground, I want to urge protestors to be very cautious about falling for the baiting and strategies of the PNP and PPD. Even though García Padilla is a PPD, he still supports the plan. He also named Sánchez Betances to the position of Secretary of Justice who served as the attorney representing the contractors of Paseo Caribe. He'll now be opposing his friends who are still suing the Government for damages even though they already decided in favor of the contractors, awarding them title of the land. We need to take the blinders off all the time and not committed to building new political structures, and practices sometimes. *That being said, I was happy to see a poster image circulating inviting the public to join in the protests against the proposed privatization of the Munoz Marin International Airport. It was an airplane divided in blue and red—the two political party colors—two wings part of the same bird. And I was even happier to see that the march against the privatization of the airport was attended by over 100,000 people. That's almost as much as the amount of people who attended the paro nacional in 2009. Puerto Rico tiene babilla (¿todavía?).*

### *Incalculable Justice*

As Derrida's interest in deconstruction is to seek a certain experience of the impossible, so to has this dissertation sought to narrate what created the feeling that another space/time, a revolutionary moment was possible. That they emerged in the

context of impossibility seems to me appropriate. It is only ever in these moments of suspension or the break that radical transformations can take place, although I am by now ambivalent as to their staying power as terrains of resistance. In turning to the “push backs” of the law while including the asides to signal my readers to the very insolubility of the law, and its tool in playing a legitimization game between the PPD and PNP, I aimed to show how they can lull us into a sense that things have changed (for the better).

If we agree, along with Derrida that we cannot calculate justice, especially not by recourse to the law, then we should follow all the threads and temporary spaces that emerge. Not only because they give us a sense of that momentary suspense, that revolutionary time but also because they give us a means to speak to justice without pretending that we could speak directly to it, a fallacy that Derrida claims could only ever betray it. In these ephemeral space/times of resistance we should be cautious of retrospective legitimations that always imply the inauguration of a new law through violence.

## **APPENDIX A: BRIEF HISTORY AND PARTIAL CHRONOLOGY OF UPR STUDENT MOVEMENT 2010-11 AND CAMPAMENTO PLAYAS PA'L PUEBLO<sup>1</sup>**

### ***University of Puerto Rico's 2010 Student Strike***

The student movement of the UPR, as we know it today began in 2005, with a student strike that went on for over one month, over tuition fee hikes, known as la huelga del CUCA (committee against the rise in tuition). Although participation was much lower in that strike than in 2010, the strikers were able to negotiate a five-year payment plan for students that struggled with economic hardship. During the years between 2005 and 2009, the students of the UPR were active in different struggles that were specific to the Río Piedras campus, including the struggle to prevent the theater from being privatized, demands for more course offerings, as well as the preservation of the Social Sciences special reserve library. In addition, they exercised constant solidarity with the professor's, and workers' claims for better working conditions. Students were particularly instrumental in supporting the striking Teachers Federation, one of the most militant unions in the island, in their 2008 strike as a part of the bumpy road to a collective bargain with the government.

As a result of threats posed by Law 7, the emergency law at the center of Governor Luis Fortuño's austerity plan, students approved the creation of new

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Marimer Berebena and Gamelyn Oduardo Sierra for sharing their own chronologies with me which assisted me greatly in the composition of this narrative history. All errors are my own.

organizational bodies known as action committees that corresponded to area of study on **September 28, 2009** in a general student assembly. These new committees began the process of constructing a new support base for political participation at the institution. These new structures were drawn from the principles of *participatory democracy* which advocate forming small area committees to increase the scale of participation without minimalizing the voice of any one person.

From early **October 2009-April 2010**, action committees organized activities to increase the school body's knowledge about the current crisis and how it would effect study at the university. Activities included general committee meetings open to members of the division small open forums, to the more traditional strategy of distributing pamphlets, holding pickets, marches.

Student activists targeted the following main issues: the availability of summer course offerings, Certification 98—a Board of Trustee proposed policy that would eliminate double eligibility for tuition waivers and financial aid—and lastly, to open the financial books of the institution and to show what justified massive cuts to services and offerings. Given the systemic nature of the issues, activists began to discuss the possibility of organizing a system-wide strike.

Near the end of the second semester, students were frustrated that they had not been taken seriously by the administration and began to contemplate more aggressive, direct action tactics. Various Faculty Assemblies were held on **April 8, 2010** to decide whether to approve a strike in the upcoming days. In addition to getting a collective vote from each action committee, these assemblies were used to decide on additional actions to be taken on the level of area of study.



As a result of said assemblies, the Humanities and Social Sciences committees approved a stoppage of their unit at the institution on **April 12, 2010**. Both were successful to varying degrees and generated a lot of excitement and interest in debating the viability of a strike at the university. They also raised levels of interest in the campus-wide General Assembly of *April 13, 2010*.

During the general assembly of **April 13, 2010**, which was held in the theater so many students showed up that they had to move some to watch the proceedings on a projector in the outdoor amphitheater at the Education unit. After about six hours of debate, *the strike was approved in the following stages. Order a 48 hour stoppage as an ultimatum to the Board of Trustees, if no reply then students would enter an indefinite strike*. A structure for a student negotiating committee was also approved: one representative to be elected by each action committee, and two additional members from two long standing committees—El CEDEP and The committee against homophobia.

On **April 21, 2010**, approximately 350 students occupy the Río Piedras campus in the early morning hours, locking each of the gated entrances with chain and padlocks. Scuffles with campus security notwithstanding, the takeover was a success. Battles with officers continued throughout the day. By late morning, the interim rector of the school, Ana Guadeloupe ordered an administrative recess for the duration of the summer. As a result, the students decided to stay the night and moved into an indefinite strike on **April 23, 2010**. It quickly spread to all the campuses in the system. Although only ten of the eleven campuses went into an indefinite strike, the final campus—the medical sciences campus of the public university system approved a twenty-four hour stoppage

in solidarity with the strikers but they opted to keep the school open to continue providing medical services to the public.

## A Partial Summary of Key Events<sup>2</sup>

### **April 28, 2010**

- After one week of occupying the campus, artists participate in a free concert held outside the main university gate on Avenida Ponce de León to support student movement named “Que vivan los estudiantes” (long live the students). Estimated 6-8000 attendees.

### **May 4, 2010**

- Confrontation between the Police riot police division that are surrounding the campus and students picketing at the security gate located on Avenida Barbosa. No one claims responsibility for the officers’ actions. Over twenty present are injured including journalists Mayra Acevedo and Luis Rolón Álvarez
- Students hold a sit-in in the iconic clock tower while deans meet with Ana Guadeloupe. They wait at the entrance to demand she dialogue with students and to offer a letter to the deans.
- Huerto Huelga (Strike Garden) is planted just a few yards from the sit-in.
- Performance *en luto por el fallecimiento de una educación pública* held at picket held outside of Jardín Botánico because officers will not let students pass to administrative building.

### **May 7, 2010**

- Human Rights/ LGBTQ activist Pedro Julio Serrano issues a press release expressing his support for the student strike as “conscience of the country.”
- During the first round of negotiations which lasted until 1:30am, the student negotiating committee and the university administration reach a preliminary list of agreements or understandings of topics for negotiation. When students receive the list from the Board of Trustees they schedule the next negotiating meeting for the following Monday (May 10).

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<sup>2</sup> Readers will note that there are two different formats for the recounting of the Student Strike and the history of the struggle against the Marriott in Isla Verde. This is to accommodate the difference in duration and to also account for the difference in available records of the day-to-day events of each movement.

**May 9, 2010**

- Mother's Day Celebration held on campus. Mother's bring student-strikers red roses and various activities held on campus, including a planting brigade with the gardening collective.
- Students disseminate the preliminary list of agreements in the daily plenary session and also to internet mediums, explaining the significance of each point and laying out issues.

**May 13, 2010**

- *Consejo de estudiantes* (student councils) calls the polemic General Assembly to decide whether to continue the strike or lift it. Amid significant protests, it is held outside the university grounds in *Centro de Convenciones* (Convention Center) in the San Juan/Condado area, with high levels of security.
- Students vote to ratify the strike, and solicit that Ygrí Rivera, President of the Board of Trustees, Ana Guadeloupe, Interim rector of the Río Piedras campus and José Ramón de la Torre, president of the University system, step down from their positions.
- Students approve a "vote of confidence" for the negotiating committee, approve the consolidation of a national negotiating committee and approve the motion to march to the capitol building to celebrate victory. Approximately 1,000 people participate.

**May 14, 2010**

- The riot police surround the campus and an order is passed that no food or water should be given to the students by outsiders.
- In the early morning, a father is arrested for attempting to give food to his son who was staying in the education camp. A video recording of the incident goes viral.
- Hundreds arrive in the early afternoon to show support to students.

**May 20, 2010**

- Violent confrontation between officers, private security and students at the Sheraton Hotel in Condado/San Juan when students attempted to crash a fundraiser organized in support of Governor Luis Fortuño.

**June 11, 2010**

- National Negotiating Committee publishes second video to YouTube the country explaining the status of negotiations and reiterating what the goals are of the movement.

**June 16, 2010**

- With the help of a court approved mediator, negotiations conclude at 11pm in the Centro judicial de San Juan.

- Administration promises not to sell any building to the public/private alliance, repeals certification 98, and promise not to institute the fiscal stabilization fee (quota) in the fall semester.

#### **June 21, 2010**

- Students from across the island are bussed into Ponce's *Coliseo Pachín Vicéns* for the first ever National Assembly held to ratify the agreements.
- Students approve a vote of a "preventive strike" that stipulates if they are not able to get the administration to repeal the fiscal stabilization fee they will enter into another indefinite strike.
- In response to student win, Governor Luis Fortuño appoints via "fast track" three additional members to the UPR Board of Trustees known conservatives and members of his political party. The measure was immediately approved by the House of Representatives and Senate without holding any public hearings of any kind.

#### **June 30, 2010**

- *La Coordinadora Nacional de Recintos Universitarios* (CoNaRU) calls an action to "take back" the legislature in protest of the fact that Congressional proceedings were closed to the public and media by Rivera Shatz for a period of three days.
- Officers attack student protestors inside the building and outside, spraying tear gases and shooting students with rubber bullets. The day becomes known as *el motín en el capitolio*.
- Two students are arrested and charged with damaging property although neither is a student at the University of Puerto Rico. Charges were eventually dropped.

#### **July 1, 2010**

- The strike is lifted. Students clean up the campus and open the gates, holding a ceremony at the main gate.

#### **July 18, 2010**

- Thousands attend the March for Dignity, organized in repudiation of the violent acts committed by officers against students on June 30, 2010.

### ***Chronology of Major Events in Second Strike***

*The strike of 2011 was really a continuation of the strike in 2010, and was organized primarily in opposition to the fiscal stabilization fee. Students were unable to*

*secure the repeal of the fee although on January 26, 2013 the Board of Trustees vote to repeal the fee effective June 2013. Students declare victory of the movement.*

**December 1, 2010**

- Strike is approved: 48 hour stoppage; following week enter into indefinite strike

**December 6, 2010**

- The night before the stoppage was set to begin, private security company Capitol Security removes the historic gates from the university.

**December 7-8, 2010**

- Stoppage is successful but there is a violent conflict between Capitol Security officers and students over the dismantling of the barricades. A security van is destroyed and appears on the front page of all major newspapers the following day.
- After stoppage is lifted, officers enter the UPR campus for the first time in over thirty years and occupy the campus.

**December 13, 2010**

- Supreme Court issues decision in *Laborde vs. Government of Puerto Rico*, finding that students do not have the right to strike.

**December 14, 2010**

- After being ignored by the administration for a week, indefinite strike begins. No occupation is possible and students hold daily activities in the morning and afternoon, mobilizing tactics such as marches, pickets, surprise (temporary) take-overs.

**December 20, 2010**

- Riot at the Natural Science Division when students attempt to disrupt classes in session. Students are trapped in Plaza Universitaria and beat up by officers. Several arrests result although all charges are dropped.

**December 24-January 11**

- Academic Recess; students organize marches and open forums in special communities across the island and in island's largest shopping mall Plaza de las Americas

**January 11, 2011**

- Hostos commemoration is held on campus followed by a march through the campus.

- Significant controversy erupts when a group of *encapuchados* storms the Student Center, breaking windows and flipping chairs and tables in the dining hall.

#### **January 12, 2011**

- Students are arrested while attempting to distribute flyers to student body. Charges are later dropped.

#### **January 20, 2011**

- Facing extreme repression by police officers, student begin organizing a series of sit-ins. Almost every day students are arrested and beat up during the proceedings.

#### **January 27, 2011**

- Sit-in at the capitol building in order to ask Senators and Representatives to issue special fund to preclude the need for the fiscal stabilization fee. The action ends in more than thirty arrests and many students are injured.

#### **February 9, 2011**

- *Pintata* (painting of consciousness street) remembered as one of the most violent days in both strikes. Students notice officers video-taping their protest and when they demand the officers shut off the cameras, they begin attacking them. More than twenty students arrested.

#### **February 11, 2011**

- In response to the *pintata*, University Professors and Staff call for a 48 hour stoppage of the institution and demand that the police exit the university grounds.
- UPR President José Ramón de la Torre resigns.

#### **February 12, 2011**

- I love the UPR march is held. Attendees decide to march through the campus after its conclusion in defiance of the officers' presence.

#### **February 22, 2011**

- In a student assembly the strike is lifted

### ***Las playas son del pueblo: Brief History of the Campsite “beaches for the people”***

*El Campamento Playas Pa'l Pueblo* is (as of 2013) an eight-year old direct action occupation, founded by a coalition of environmental activists and nearby

residents on **March 15, 2005** in order to block the construction of the Marriott Residence Inn—a 15 floor building with 196 luxury apartment units—on five acres of public coastal land. The occupation was enabled by an injunction secured by the legal defense team, based out of the University of Puerto Rico environmental clinic. At issue is the legality of a *March 11, 1996 rental contract for ninety-nine years* which was awarded to the Marriott Corporation and its developer HR Properties by now defunct branch of the Government known as *Fomento de Recreación*.

Prior to the official occupation, two main activities were organized in protest of the development project. **On March 4, 2005**, attorney Jessica Rodríguez Martín, together with Wanda Colón, Director of the Caribbean Project for Justice and Peace, and the Director of *Dasonomía Tropical* Ariel Lugo, held a press conference on the lands. Accompanied by activists and concerned citizens, they expressed concern that HR Properties had already leveled the land and removed a substantial amount of sand from the beach without submitting an environmental impact statement.

A little more than a week later, on **March 13, 2005**, activists organize “For Land and Sea” a protest attended by hundreds organized in repudiation of the Marriott’s Residence Inn Project and the rental contract that authorized it. Protestors demand that the Government repeal the contract. The march was a creative one; protestors arrived by foot, on bikes, surf boards and kayaks. When they arrived to the border of the lands, they presented a file on the case to the Manager of the Hotel who reportedly dismissed the protestors. As a result, the protests decide to form a coalition to support the case, La Coalición Playas Pa’l Pueblo and Amigos del M.A.R. sponsored the founding of a resistance campsite on the grounds. On **March 27, 2005** and **April 3, 2005**, activists

organized a work brigade, known as “Operation Pick and Shovel” to remove the concrete foundation of the building that had already been laid before the injunction was secured. The concrete was offered to the public free of charge and sought to generate consciousness of the controversy in the public at large.

The legal case has already been through two iterations in the court. In 2005, when activists and community members brought the issue to the courts, they were joined by the municipality of Carolina and Parque Nacionales (National Parks division of the government and the official custodian of the lands). Within two months, the activists won the case when the Supreme Court of Carolina declared the contract null and void.

However, the decision was reversed for a technicality related to the clause of “tercer reigstro” or third party. As a result of said clause, First Bank, the company who actually mortgaged the land entered the litigation the case had to begin again. But in 2011, Parque Nacionales changed its position on the case and joined the side of HR properties and the Marriott and the activists and community members lost, the judge finding that they did not have the standing to contest the legality of the contract. In so doing, the court approved one of the most reactionary interpretations of standing, leaving the affected communities and neighbors without recourse to challenge the project after more than six years of litigation. Although the case has been sent to appeals, it does not look promising. Although a unique case in terms of duration (now heading for its eighth year of existence) and litigation history, the campsite refers to a commonplace matter of defacto privatization of the coastline.



Since its founding the campsite has served in a node of a larger panorama of resistance against privatization, supporting struggles in Piñones against a similar construction project named Costa Serena (defeated in 2007), Paseo Caribe, protection of leatherback sea turtles, the struggle against the privatization of el Pozo del Obispo in Arecibo, among other struggles. During the eight year occupation, the five acres were successfully rescued by activists and reforested through various planting brigades of trees, flowers, herbs and a kitchen garden. In contrast to the UPR struggle, the idea of autonomy proffered there was reflected in the spatial transformations—an anti-establishment design (as I was told by one interlocutor, the structure of no structure) that was understood to be a free space for community interaction. It offers a place for interactions between a non-activist public and radical leftists who often find themselves engaged in impromptu debates about politics and everyday small problems. As such, it served as an unique meeting place that brought together people across class divides that tend to remain pretty fixed in Puerto Rico. While hardcore activists who remained for years on end occupying the space shared a resolute sense of the need to sacrifice in the name of the public, the community of resident squatters themselves also held a strongly individualist notion of autonomy in the day-to-day running of the campsite, what Bookchin calls “lifestyle anarchism” (1995). Residents do what they want and do not respond well to calls for dialogue, collaboration or reflection, pointing to the “tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman 2012 [1971]). In addition, all the male residents I spoke to did not see themselves as part of the group who founded the camp (usually credited to Amigos del M.A.R., Friends of the Sea, an environmental organization which originated in the Vieques struggle, setting up encampments in the bombing zone) or as

members of the coalition which was said to govern it. In a way these are just committed activists who span a cross section of the populace (in terms of age, race and class although resolutely limited in terms of gender—here make it clear that I refer here to residents.

On **February 15, 2013** Eduardo “Tati” Ferrer Bolívar, developer and businessman sued the Municipality of Carolina as well as individual members of the encampment (Alberto de Jesus and Ricardo de Soto) for over \$5 million in damages and has demanded that the court evict the resident-squatters.

## APPENDIX B: CARTA AL PAÍS (LETTER TO THE COUNTRY)

The following is my translation of the students' letter to the country which was published in the newspapers *El Nuevo Día* and *Primera Hora*, as well as distributed to concertgoers on the day of the concert. The original Spanish version follows the translation.

April 21, 2010

Dear Country:

Today we write you this letter because when you open your eyes, you will see our stoppage in action. When you woke up surely you heard the Governor Luis Fortuño Burset, the superintendent of police José Figueroa Sancha and many other functionaries of the government that refer to us as “rebels” that “don’t want to study” in order to censor our voices. We ask that you listen to us because we will speak honestly to you.

Don’t let yourself be fooled, no believe that we don’t want to study. Of course we want to but we want you, country of Puerto Rico, to be able to study. For our right to education and yours too, we are realizing this stoppage.

The Government intends to use confrontation as a smokescreen to divert media attention from the attention from the responsible claims and proposals that we have made. Since we want to study, we are outraged at the cuts that threaten both regular academic offerings as well as those offered in the summer, tuition waivers, the cost of tuition, and services that are vital to the functioning of the university. The school’s administration controlled by the Board of Trustees, intend to disrupt the education of thousands of students who are prepared academically and professionally to serve. A public university fulfills the function of democratizing education, to ensure that more citizens can be educated properly and then serve society as professionals. Although we have concrete proposals to address the deficit and we have constantly sought to negotiate, the UPR administration has closed the doors of dialogue repeatedly.

The University is a reflection of the reality that we are facing as a country. We denounce the deterioration of your living conditions and the conditions under which we study are the result of mismanagement, waste and corruption.

As you can see, we have realized this stoppage because what we want more than anything is to study so that we can then put our knowledge into practice. We fight even though some of us will soon graduate because we know that there are others (the multitude) that still aspire to receive the best education available in our country (the UPR). Such an education is endangered when the UPR administration and PR

Government, favoring private interests (over the public), aim to delimit the learning environment to a mere exchange between customer and merchant.

We use the stoppage<sup>1</sup> because we want our sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters to have access to a quality public university as we have had, thanks to you.

Sincerely,

The students of the University of Puerto Rico

“Knowledge is the most powerful weapon of the human race and of a people so you must defend it.”

21 de abril de 2010

Querido País:

Hoy te escribimos esta carta porque, cuando abras tus ojos, nos verás en plena acción de paro. Al despertar seguramente habrás escuchado al gobernador Luis Fortuño Burset, al superintendente José Figueroa Sancha y a tantos otros funcionarios referirse a nosotros como "revoltosos" que "no quieren estudiar" – para censurar nuestras voces. Pedimos que nos escuches pues te hablaremos honestamente.

No te dejes engañar, no creas que no queremos estudiar. Claro que queremos, pero también buscamos que tú, pueblo de Puerto Rico, puedas estudiar. Por nuestro derecho a la educación y por el tuyo, hoy realizamos este paro.

El gobierno pretende utilizar la confrontación como cortina de humo en los medios para desviar la atención de los responsables reclamos y propuestas que hemos hecho. Porque queremos estudiar nos indignamos ante los recortes que atentan contra: el ofrecimiento académico regular y de verano, las exenciones, el costo de la matrícula y los servicios fundamentales para el funcionamiento de la Universidad. La administración de la UPR, controlada por la Junta de Síndicos, pretende entorpecer la educación de miles de estudiantes que se preparan académica y profesionalmente para servirte. Una universidad pública tiene la función de democratizar la educación, de asegurar que la mayor cantidad de ciudadanos puedan educarse adecuadamente para luego servir a la sociedad como profesionales. A pesar de que tenemos propuestas concretas para atender el déficit y que hemos buscado negociar constantemente, la administración de la UPR ha cerrado las puertas del diálogo en repetidas ocasiones.

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<sup>1</sup> The exact translation of this phrase would be *we stopped*, instead of we use the stoppage which refers explicitly to the body, and the implication that their bodies made the paralyzation of the school happen.

La Universidad es reflejo de la realidad que enfrenta el País. Denunciamos que el deterioro de tus condiciones de vida y nuestras condiciones de estudio son producto de la mala administración, despilfarro y corrupción.

Como ves, realizamos este paro porque lo más que queremos es estudiar para poner en práctica nuestros conocimientos. Lo hacemos porque, aunque algunos nos graduamos pronto, nos siguen multitudes de estudiantes que aspiran a recibir la mejor educación que se ofrece en nuestro país. Esa educación peligra cuando administración de la UPR y el gobierno, favoreciendo los intereses privados, procura reducir el ambiente educativo a una mera transacción entre cliente y comerciante.

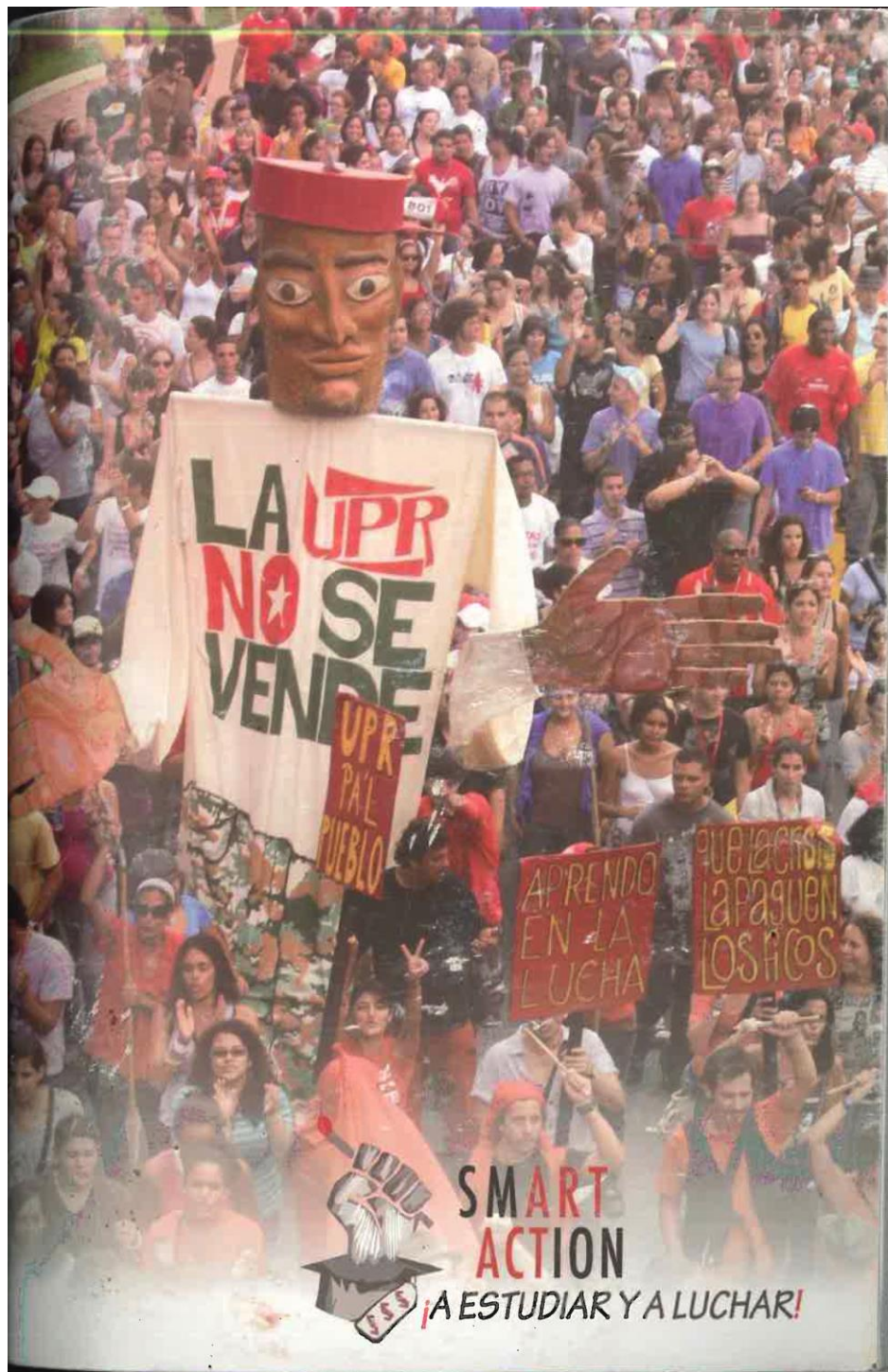
Paramos porque queremos que nuestros hijos e hijas, nietos y nietas tengan una educación pública superior como la hemos tenido nosotros gracias a ti.

Atentamente,

Los y las estudiantes de la Universidad de Puerto Rico

*"El conocimiento es el arma más poderosa del ser humano y de un pueblo, por esto hay que defenderlo."*

## Appendix C: SmartAction Catalogue<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> This catalogue has been reproduced with the permission of the exhibit organizer Stephan Andreas



A collaborative art exhibition inspired by the 2010-2011 UPR student movement.



**OCT 3 - NOV 29, 2012**  
450 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10421



**el puente**  
LEARNERS FOR PEACE & JUSTICE  
**OCT 9 - 13, 2012**  
211 South 4th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11211

smArtAction: ¡A estudiar y a luchar! is dedicated to the University of Puerto Rico students and their supporters, whose strength, vision and effort continue to inspire creativity and action.

smArtAction: ¡A estudiar y a luchar! está dedicado a los estudiantes de la Universidad de Puerto Rico y a quienes los apoyan, cuya fuerza, visión y esfuerzo continúan inspirando creatividad y acción.

smArtAction Exhibition Organizers:

Stephan Andreas, Marimer Barberena, Isabel Ferro, Lindsay C. Harris,  
Pedro Lugo, Tina Orladini, Lourdes Santiago

## INTRODUCTION

*smArtAction: ¡A estudiar y a luchar!* is organized by a collaboration of students from New York University (NYU), the City University of New York Graduate Center (CUNY) and the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), presented in partnership with El Puente and Hostos Community College. What started as the NYU Arts Politics pioneer class in Puerto Rico evolved into a creative and socially engaged, cross-cultural project inspired by the UPR student movement of 2010 and 2011. *smArtAction* is guided by manifestations of solidarity and creative activism in response to education reform and cultural equity.

Since February of 2012 *smArtAction* has grown with a mission to provide a platform for artistic expression and dialogue engaging students in current issues of education. The project continues to build a network of students, artists, activists and organizers dedicated to challenging the ways people think about access to quality education, now and in the future. Most importantly, this project stimulates discussion about the role of art as a means of communication in student-led social movements.

The exhibition features a myriad of objects varying in content, purpose, medium and artistic style. This collection includes artwork created during the student strikes, produced in solidarity with the movement, and relating more broadly to issues of education. The thread that unites each piece is a belief in the transformative power of art as a tool for social change, a strategy eloquently demonstrated by the courageous students of the UPR. The exhibition gathers the work of artists, activists and creative thinkers, offering a space to reflect, appreciate, and acknowledge the creative force infused within the UPR student movement. *smArtAction* serves to document the 2010 and 2011 strikes and share the significance of such struggle in present and future discussions about education.

## INTRODUCCIÓN

*smArtAction: ¡A estudiar y a luchar!* se organizó con la colaboración de estudiantes de la Universidad de Nueva York (NYU), el Centro Graduado de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York (CUNY) y la Universidad de Puerto Rico (UPR), presentado en conexión con El Puente y Hostos Community College. Lo que comenzó en un curso de Política de las Artes de NYU en Puerto Rico, se convirtió en un proyecto intercultural creativo y socialmente comprometido e inspirado en el movimiento estudiantil de la UPR entre 2010 y 2011. *smArtAction* se deja llevar por las manifestaciones de solidaridad y activismo creativo en respuesta a la reforma universitaria y la equidad cultural.

Desde febrero de 2012 *smArtAction* creció con la meta de desarrollar una plataforma para la expresión artística y el diálogo capaz de involucrar a estudiantes con los problemas actuales de la educación. El proyecto continúa construyendo una red de estudiantes, artistas, activistas y organizadores dedicados a retar las maneras en las que se piensa sobre el acceso a una educación de calidad, ahora y en el futuro. Sobre todo, este proyecto estimula la discusión sobre el papel del arte como medio de comunicación en los movimientos estudiantiles.

La exposición cuenta con una variedad de objetos que varían en contenido, propósito, medio y estilo artístico. Incluye obras de arte creadas durante las huelgas estudiantiles, realizadas en solidaridad con el movimiento, y relacionadas a aspectos más generales de la educación. El hilo que une a cada pieza es una creencia en el poder transformador del arte como herramienta para el cambio social, una estrategia demostrada elocuentemente por los estudiantes valientes de la UPR. La exposición reúne el trabajo de artistas, activistas y pensadores creativos, ofreciendo un espacio para reflexionar, valorar y reconocer la fuerza creativa engendrada dentro del movimiento estudiantil de la UPR. *smArtAction* sirve para documentar las huelgas de 2010 y 2011 y compartir el significado de esa lucha en los debates actuales y futuros sobre la educación.





ISAMAR ABREU (Puerto Rico)  
*Área de expresión pública*, 2011  
 Digital print on single weight board, 10" x 15"

10



RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Cuerpos pintados I*, 2011  
 Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

11



ANONYMOUS (Austria)  
*Recinto Moderno / Modern Campus*, 2012  
 Triptych, acrylic on wood, 108" x 72" (36" x 24" ea.)

12



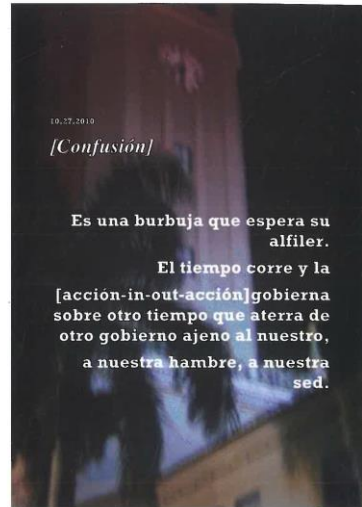
EDEN BASTIDA KULLICK (México)  
*TV Estencil I*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

13



JOSÉ GABRIEL BAUZÓ LLANES (Puerto Rico)  
*Asfixia*, 2010  
 Acrylic on canvas, 47½" x 20"

14



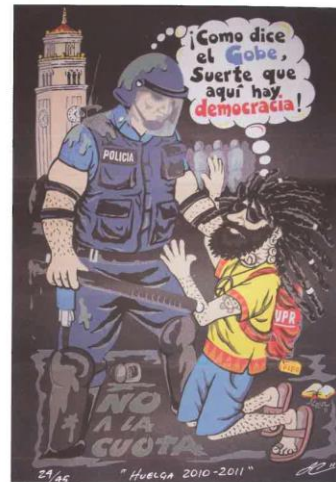
MARIMER BERBERENA (Puerto Rico)  
*Confusión*, 2010  
 Blogpoem into picture, 8½" x 11"

15



ARNALDO COTTO REYES (Puerto Rico)  
 Untitled (from series), 2010  
 Gelatin silver print, 20" x 45" x 1/2" (9" x 6" x 1/2" ea.)

16



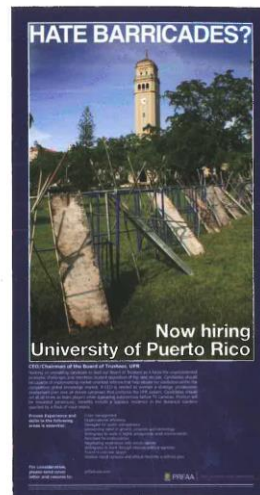
JAIME CRUZ, "MACHETERO" (Puerto Rico)  
 Que vivan los estudiantes, 2011  
 Silkscreen, 11 1/2" x 17 1/2"

17



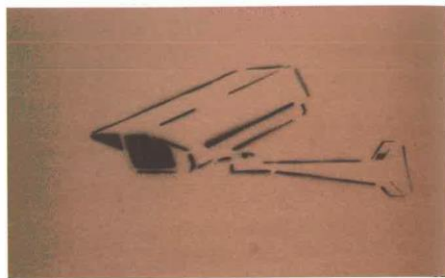
EL SÓTANO 00931 (Puerto Rico)  
La isla menos la IUPI, 2011  
Digital print, 11" x 17 1/4" ea. (9 pages)

18



EQUIS (Puerto Rico)  
Hate Barricades?, 2010  
Giclee print, 30" x 50"

19



LENA GALÍNDEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Untitled I*, Date unknown  
 X-ray sheet / spray paint on cardboard, 17" x 14" (9" x 6")

20



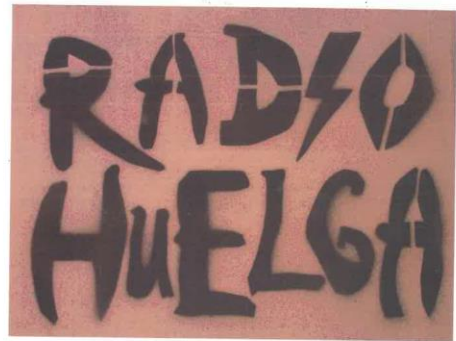
MARÍA HEYACA (Latinoamericana)  
*Jarto-Homenaje A. Roberto Sanchez*, 2011  
 Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

21



JUVENTUD 23 (Puerto Rico)  
 Untitled, 2011  
 Acrylic on wooden shield, 36" x 24"

22



PEDRO LUGO (Puerto Rico)  
 Radio Huelga Stencil, 2011  
 Mylar / spray paint on cardboard, 11" x 14" (9 1/2" x 12 1/2")

23



JAVIER MALDONADO-O'FARRILL (Puerto Rico)  
9 de febrero de 2011, 2011  
Intaglio-type, 12 3/4" x 16"

24



PABLO MARCANO GARCÍA (Puerto Rico)  
Virgen de la Lucha, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas, 52" x 62"

25





YUIZA MARTÍNEZ RIVERA (Puerto Rico)  
Engendros de Humanidades: Assembly poster, 2012  
Digital print on single weight board, 9" x 12"

26



MICHELLE MARTÍNEZ ROSARIO "AQUARELA" (Puerto Rico)  
El Bufón, 2010  
Oil on canvas, 34½" x 24¼"

27



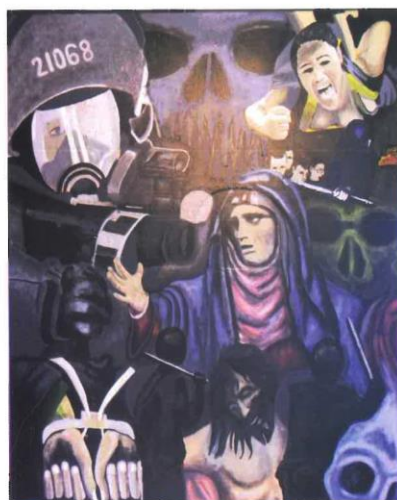
ANTONIO MARTORELL (Puerto Rico)  
*Salte de la Torre, La Torre es Nuestra*, 2011  
Silkscreen on cotton, 18" x 20"

26



ELSA MARÍA MELÉNDEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*El ingenio colectivo o la maldición de la coforra*, 2010-2011  
Detail of mixed-media installation, 185" x 95"

27



MÉXICANOS DE ROSTRO DESCONOCIDO (México)  
*tumultuosos ahogados y el precio de nuestra educación*, 2012  
 Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48"

28



JUAN FERNANDO MORALES (Puerto Rico/New York)  
*Colgao*, 2012  
 Installation, Variable dimensions

29



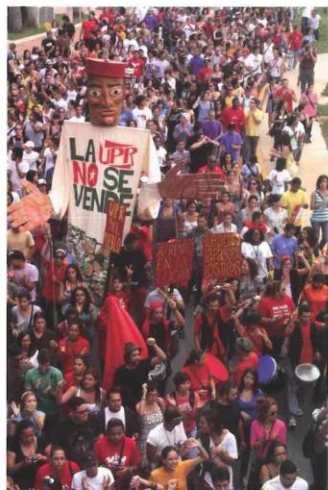
PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Azules pintados / Blue in paint, 2011  
Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

30



MULTIPLE ARTISTS (Edited by SOFÍA GALLISÁ MURIENTE)  
Solidarity videos from around the world, 2012  
DVD (Still Image from video)

31



PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico)  
El estudiante militante, 2010  
Papier-mâché, cloth, acrylic, 168" x 216"  
(photo by Michelle Collado)

32



MICHELLE R.O. (Puerto Rico)  
Material Recuperado / Recovered Image, 2012  
Video projection on DVD, 16:05 minutes  
(Still Image from video, photo by Alexandra Sierra)

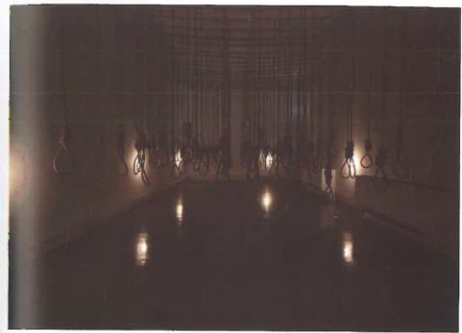
33

& yes i am in your dilemma again

presiento que la historia nos absorberá mientras la gente más hermosa que conozco camina en círculos sostenidos por sonoridades a lo largo y ancho de la calle han repartido un mapa mimo para dejar caer su ruido en caso de correr voy contando compañeros como cerditos dedo a dedo o como ovejas para dormir y si alguno no aparece manos enemigas han trazado otro lugar en su imaginación cada estudiante que cae son dos mimos pequeñitos que me cuelgan de las cuencas de los ojos e intuyo perímetros de sentimientos estrategias de conservación (que no le toquen ni un pelo en el cuartel) presiento que la historia nos abandonará mientras cuento solidaridades con los dedos la gente más hermosa se sostiene sonoramente quieren quemar el lugar

GUILLERMO REBOLLO-GIL (Puerto Rico)  
 & Yes i am in your dilemma again, 2010  
 Digital print on newspaper, 14" x 17"

34



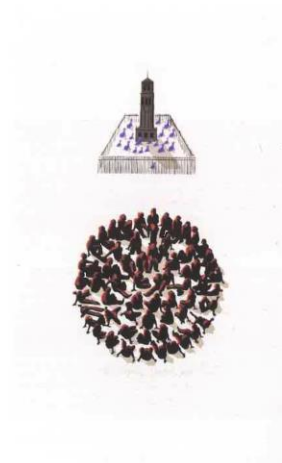
QUINTÍN RIVERA-TORO, (Puerto Rico)  
 El grupo de los cien / The Top One Hundred, 2010  
 Digital print, 30" x 40"

35



ERIKA P. RODRÍGUEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*In the struggle: Education II / En la lucha: Educación II, 2010*  
 Digital print with matte frame, 11" x 14"

36



NELSON SAMBOLIN (Puerto Rico)  
*Campus II, 2011*  
 Silk screen, 44 1/4" x 23"  
 Courtesy of Guatibiri Gallery

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ALEXANDRA SIERRA (Puerto Rico)  
*Anónimos en la lucha, anónimos en la brega /*  
*Anonymous in the struggle, anonymous in the fight, 2012*  
 Digital impression or digital drawing, 62 ½" x 98 ¾" (12 ½" x 19 ¾" ea.)

38



YANIROCA (Puerto Rico)  
*UPRRP, los estudiantes, la lucha y la educación, 2012*  
 Acrylic and colored pencil on canvas, 24" x 48"

39



CHECKLIST OF ARTWORK • LISTA DE OBRAS DE ARTE

ISAMAR ABREU (Puerto Rico)  
*Área de expresión pública*, 2011  
 Digital print on single weight board, 10" x 15"

ISAMAR ABREU (Puerto Rico)  
*La UPR no se vende*, 2011  
 Digital print on single weight board, 10" x 15"

RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Cuerpos pintados I*, 2010  
 Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Cuerpos pintados II*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Pancarta de Luis Fortuño*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Payasos de la Policía I*, 2010  
 Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Payasos de la Policía II*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

RICARDO ALCARAZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Huelga en la UPR / Celebración tras la firma de los acuerdos*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

ANONYMOUS (Austria)  
*Recinto Moderno / Modern Campus*, 2012  
 Triptych, acrylic on wood, 108" x 72" (36" x 24" ea.)

EDEN BASTIDA KULLICK (México)  
*TV Estencil I*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

EDEN BASTIDA KULLICK (México)  
*TV Estencil II*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

40

JOSÉ GABRIEL BAUZÓ LLANES (Puerto Rico)  
*Asfixia*, 2010  
 Acrylic on canvas, 47½" x 20"

MARIMER BERBERENA (Puerto Rico)  
*Confusión*, 2010  
 Blogpoem into picture, 8½" x 11"

ARNALDO COTTO REYES (Puerto Rico)  
*Untitled*, 2010  
 Gelatin silver print, 20" x 45" x ½" (9" x 6" x ½" ea.)

JAIIME CRUZ, "MACHETERO" (Puerto Rico)  
*Que vivan los estudiantes*, 2011  
 Silkscreen, 11½" x 17½"

EL SÓTANO 00931 (Puerto Rico)  
*La isla menos la IUPI*, 2011  
 Digital print, 11" x 17 ½" ea. (9 pages)

EQUIS (Puerto Rico)  
*Hate Barricades*, 2010  
 Giclée print, 30" x 50"

EQUIS (Puerto Rico)  
*We are not looking for Negotiators*, 2010  
 Giclée print, 60" x 30"

EQUIS (Puerto Rico)  
*Hate Barricades*, 2010  
 Giclée print, 30" x 50"

LENA GALÍNDEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Untitled I*, Date unknown  
 X-ray sheet / spray paint on cardboard, 17" x 14" (9" x 6")

LENA GALÍNDEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*Untitled II*, Date unknown  
 X-ray sheet / spray paint on cardboard, 17" x 14" (9" x 6")

MARÍA HEYACA (Latinoamericana)  
*Jarto-Homenaje A. Roberto Sanchez*, 2011  
 Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

JUVENTUD 23 (Puerto Rico)  
*Untitled*, 2011  
 Acrylic on wooden shield, 36" x 24"

41

PEDRO LUGO (Puerto Rico)  
Radio Huelga Stencil, 2011  
Mylar / spray paint on cardboard, 11" x 14" (9 1/2" x 12 1/2")

PEDRO LUGO (Puerto Rico)  
Message by Fortuño?, 2012  
CD

PEDRO LUGO & LOURDES SANTIAGO (Puerto Rico)  
Radio Huelga Installation, 2012  
Mixed media, Variable dimensions

JAVIER MALDONADO-O'FARRILL (Puerto Rico)  
9 de febrero de 2011, 2011  
Intaglio-type, 12 1/2" x 16"

JAVIER MALDONADO-O'FARRILL (Puerto Rico)  
20 de enero de 2011, 2011  
Intaglio-type, 7 1/2" x 11"

PABLO MARCANO GARCÍA (Puerto Rico)  
Virgen de la Lucha, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas, 52" x 62"

YUIZA MARTÍNEZ RIVERA (Puerto Rico)  
Contagi(arte): El arte de la protesta, 2011  
Digital print on lustre, 11" x 14"

YUIZA MARTÍNEZ RIVERA (Puerto Rico)  
Engendros de Humanidades: Assembly poster, 2012  
Digital print on single weight board, 9" x 12"

MICHELLE MARTINEZ ROSARIO "AQUARELA" (Puerto Rico)  
Represión Policiaca, 2011  
Oil on canvas, 25" x 22"

MICHELLE MARTINEZ ROSARIO "AQUARELA" (Puerto Rico)  
El Bufón, 2010  
Oil on canvas, 34 1/2" x 24 1/4"

MICHELLE MARTINEZ ROSARIO "AQUARELA" (Puerto Rico)  
El Superintendente de la Policía, 2010  
Oil on canvas, 54" x 24"

ANTONIO MARTORELL (Puerto Rico)  
Sentida nota de duelo, 2010  
Digital print on newspaper, 14" x 17"

ANTONIO MARTORELL (Puerto Rico)  
Salte de la Torre, La Torre es Nuestra, 2011  
Silkscreen on cotton, 18" x 20"

ELSA MARÍA MELÉNDEZ (Puerto Rico)  
El ingenio colectivo o la maldición de la cotorra, 2010-2011  
Detail of mixed-media installation, 185" x 95"

MÉXICANOS DE ROSTRO DESCONOCIDO (México)  
tumultus ahogados y el precio de nuestra educación, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Esqueletos del arte / Art's skeletons, 2011  
Digital print on foam board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Arte censurada / Censored art, 2011  
Digital print on single weight board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
¡Ay, el dramal / Oh, the dramal, 2010  
Digital print on single weight board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Azules pintados / Blue in paint, 2011  
Digital print on foam board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
La otra cara / The other face, 2010  
Digital print on single weight board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Pintando la Calle de Conciencia / Painting the Street with Conscience, 2011  
Digital print on foam board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Allá arriba / Up there, 2010  
Digital print on single weight board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Pintura, nuestra arma / Paint, our weapon, 2011  
Digital print on single weight board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
Portones abajo! / Gates torn down!, 2010  
Digital print on single weight board, 9 1/2" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
*Reflejos de verdades / Reflections of truths*, 2010  
 Digital print on foam board, 9½" x 14"

PAMELA MORALES NIEVES (Puerto Rico)  
*Exprésate aquí / Express yourself here*, 2010  
 Digital print on single weight board, 9½" x 14"

JUAN FERNANDO MORALES (Puerto Rico/New York)  
*Colgao*, 2012  
 Installation, Variable dimensions

MULTIPLE ARTISTS (Edited by ISABEL FERRO)  
*smArtAction Interviews*, 2012  
 DVD

MULTIPLE ARTISTS (Edited by SOFÍA GALLISÁ MURIENTE)  
*Solidarity videos from around the world*, 2012  
 DVD

PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico)  
*Ø Policia*, 2011  
 Acrylic on plastic, 25" x 85"

PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico)  
*Ø Cuota*, 2011  
 Acrylic on plastic, 25" x 90"

PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico)  
*El estudiante militante*, 2010  
 Papier-mâché, cloth, acrylic, 168" x 216"

PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico)  
*Doña Quota / Miss Fee*, 2011  
 Papier-mâché, cloth, acrylic, 66" x 16"

PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico) Built by Dario Justiniano  
*A Defender la UPR I*, 2010  
 Acrylic and spray paint on wooden shield, 29 ¾" x 16"

PAPEL MACHETE (Puerto Rico) Built by Dario Justiniano  
*A Defender la UPR II*, 2010  
 Acrylic and spray paint on wooden shield, 32" x 16"

VLADIMIR PÉREZ AND SKEW (Puerto Rico)  
*Precinto 801*, 2011  
 SoundCloud audio track, 4:11 minutes

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MICHELLE R.O. (Puerto Rico)  
*Material Recuperado / Recovered Image*, 2012  
 Video projection on DVD, 16:05 minutes

GUILLERMO REBOLLO-GIL (Puerto Rico)  
*& Yes i am in your dilemma again*, 2010  
 Digital print on newspaper, 14" x 17"

GUILLERMO REBOLLO-GIL (Puerto Rico)  
*With the feeling that animates our time*, 2011  
 Digital print on newspapers, 14" x 17"

QUINTÍN RIVERA-TORO (Puerto Rico)  
*El grupo de los cien / The Top One Hundred*, 2010  
 Digital print, 30" x 40"

ERIKA P. RODRÍGUEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*In the struggle: Education I / En la lucha: Educación I*, 2010  
 Digital print with matte frame, 11" x 14"

ERIKA P. RODRÍGUEZ (Puerto Rico)  
*In the struggle: Education II / En la lucha: Educación II*, 2010  
 Digital print with matte frame, 11" x 14"

NELSON SAMBOLIN (Puerto Rico)  
*Campus II*, 2011  
 Silkscreen, 44¼" x 23" (Courtesy of Guatibiri Gallery)

ALEXANDRA SIERRA (Puerto Rico)  
*Anónimos en la lucha, anónimos en la brega / Anonymous in the struggle, anonymous in the fight*, 2012  
 Digital impression or digital drawing, 62 ½" x 98 ¾" (12 ½" x 19 ¾" ea.)

ALEXANDRA SIERRA (Puerto Rico)  
*Untitled*, Date unknown  
 Papier-mâché video camera, 7 ½" x 3 ½" x 3 ½"

ALEXANDRA SIERRA (Puerto Rico)  
*Tipos de prensa*, 2012  
 DVD, 9:10 minutes

YANIROCA (Puerto Rico)  
*UPRRP, los estudiantes, la lucha y la educación*, 2012  
 Acrylic and colored pencil on canvas, 24" x 48"

45

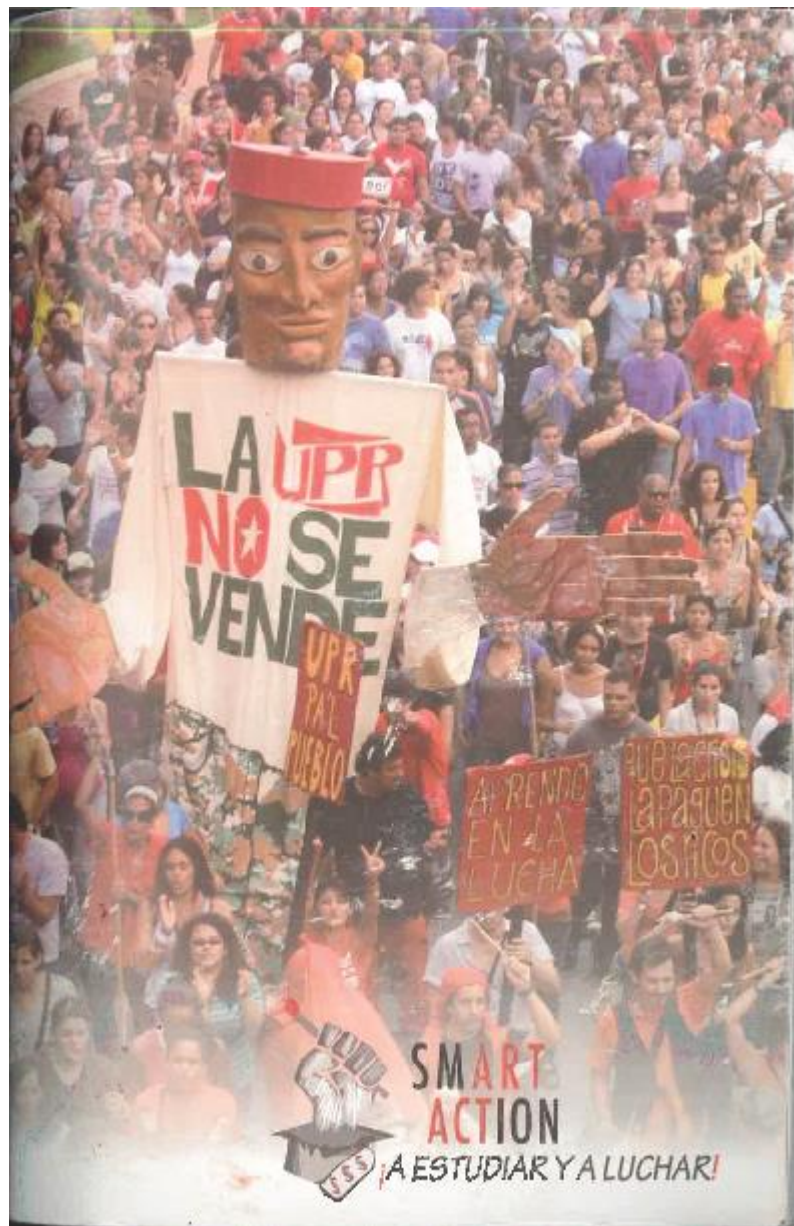
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